

# MY TWO WIVES

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MY FIRST WIFE

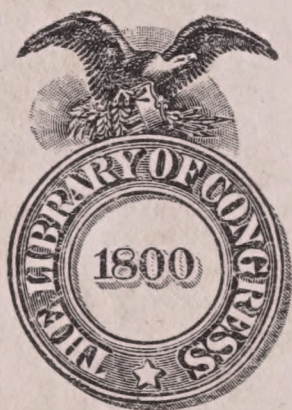
BY HER SECOND HUSBAND

MY SECOND WIFE

BY HER FIRST HUSBAND

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MY TWO WIVES

*THE "UNKNOWN" LIBRARY*



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30. **MY TWO WIVES.** By ONE OF  
THEIR HUSBANDS.



THE "UNKNOWN" LIBRARY

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# MY TWO WIVES

BY ONE OF THEIR HUSBANDS

*IN TWO PARTS*

Part I

## MY FIRST WIFE

BY HER SECOND HUSBAND

Part II

## MY SECOND WIFE

BY HER FIRST HUSBAND

With an Editorial Preface by ELDON PHEWFERS, Esq.,  
etc., etc., and an Authorial Introduction by  
Mr. TIMOTHY MOLESKIN, Husband  
of the two Mrs. Moleskins

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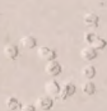
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## EDITORIAL PREFACE.

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**I**N compliance with the urgent request of Mr. Timothy Moleskin, a very worthy man and for many years my family grocer, I undertook—for a pecuniary consideration—to revise, edit, and generally prepare for the press the following record of his marital experiences.

His chief reason for wishing me to do him this service, which he was good enough to say he should regard as a great personal favor, was that I knew his handwriting so well, which indeed I did; but, being a very simple-minded, straightforward, grocer-like man, he added, candidly enough, that spelling was always a weak point with him; and this I certainly found also to be quite true. I politely told him, however, that such orthographical eccentricity—I used this form of expression advisedly;



one must do something for one's editorial fee—bad spelling, in fact, was common enough in fairly good society, including therein young authors, male and female, of establishing reputations, and even among ladies and gentlemen who had just completed their education at genteel finishing schools of the highest character and terms; but that their inaccurate spelling was usually concealed from the vulgar eye by their illegible writing, one defect thus counteracting another, and so passed undetected.

I could but compliment him, however, on his own excellent calligraphy, every sheet of his MS. being written in the bold, clear, commercial hand with which I had been familiarized by frequent, I may say periodic, communications, all word for word alike, running:

“TO ELDON PHEWFEEES, Esq., etc.

“SIR: Having to meet a bill next Friday”—or Monday, Tuesday, or other day, for I had them for each one, save of course the day of rest—“I shall be glad if it well be Convenient to you to Oblige me,” etc., etc. The remainder, being confidential, and of no public interest, is omitted.

In fulfilling my delicate editorial task, I have, as far as was possible, retained Mr. Moleskin's own words



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and idioms, dexterously and slightly altering his composition only when some luckless sentence seemed too ungrammatical for decent perusal, or its meaning quite beyond the comprehension of an ordinarily intelligent Cook's tourist or bank holiday excursionist. Occasionally, if not often, however, I have allowed grammatical and other errors to pass uncorrected, Mr. Moleskin's forcible and characteristic vernacular conveying the sense as clearly as Addisonian periods could do.

I confess I was frequently amazed at his language and style, which were totally different from what I should have expected from him as a man of originally but middle-class commercial education. He has himself given some modest explanation of this, and I think it singularly creditable to him that with his scant opportunities, nay, even with the *viva voce* teaching of his first wife, he should have stored his memory with so many polysyllabic words, and been able to introduce them so freely, and sometimes even appropriately, into his composition. I was also pleased to see how gracefully he accepted most of my excisions and emendations, with a patient acquiescence, indeed, which I, who have myself aforetime been ruthlessly edited, witnessed with pleasure, not unmixed



with surprise. I had no difficulty in getting him to understand that such an expression, for example, as "my missis," though perfectly intelligible, was somewhat inelegant, and that the substitution of "my mistress" only rendered the phrase yet more improper, there being still in the upper and more rigidly correct circles of society an appreciable difference of meaning between the words wife and mistress; and I assured him that the observance of these nice distinctions marks the polite writer as much as the stern moralist.

In such cases, not very numerous after all, the author readily yielded to the critic, Mr. Moleskin merely saying that so long as he provided the substance, the facts and ideas, so to say, he would leave the form, the spelling, grammar, sense, and all such trifles, to me; "but," he continued, "as I am to pay the printer, I want it to be my book, not yours; because, you know, they are my wives, not——" "Moleskin," said I hastily, interrupting his expression of a possibility disagreeable even to contemplate—"Moleskin, my good fellow, they were, or are, or, shall I say, were and are your successive wives, and no one else's, certainly not mine; and this is to be absolutely, entirely your book, with my preface only; but



in our joint labors, you as author, I as editor, we have wrought in one spirit, that of every true artist, to whom his work itself is its own exceeding great, all-sufficing reward. To you to have recorded the shining domestic virtues and affections of your lost, lamented, and loving living spouses has been a labor of love. To me also — regardless of any honorarium—to have edited the same, though not so strictly a labor of love, that is to say, of connubial love, has been a pleasant task.”

“Mr. Phewfees,” replied Mole-skin, “I honor you for your sentiments about connubial love, which I don’t think anyone, even in these days, ought to feel for a married woman, unless she is his wife. Love me, don’t love my wife, is a good old proverb; or ought to be.”

E. P.









## INTRODUCTORY.

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**W**HEN I should give to the world this record of my married lives seems to myself so surprising that I cannot but think the world itself must be equally astonished at my doing so, and very desirous to know what could have caused such a breach of family confidence; and I therefore hasten to relieve its neighborly curiosity, and to explain that the personal character of these domestic memoirs is largely due to the Rev. R. Trotwell, of whom the reader may probably have heard. He was originally one of my hands, at 37 Lower High Street, St. Kitt's the Less, Southwark; and, I must say for him, as clever a young man as any I ever had in my service, and as civil to good customers as any shopman could be expected to be, not being a principal in his own business; but so intelligent and clever that I



had to part with him, he being in fact too clever to bring his attention down to those humble little details of my business on which its success so much depended, though no juster judge of teas, especially Indian, ever served behind my counter. But, of course, with Spicers' only a few yards up the street, and Stores Bros.' nearly opposite, I could not see my trade going to the dogs, as I may say, and myself ruined that way, if he *was* a bookmaker; my motto being, Everyone to his trade, and his not being that of an author, but a respectable grocer, with a Wine License. Now, without going the length of saying that genius and grocery are incompatible, I do boldly assert that in a retail grocer's shop a capacity for taking pains is ten times as valuable as genius of a literary turn.

To return to Roger. I overlooked it that time when he gave Schneider the baker's servant, Mary, blasting powder for black lead, and almost blew her nose off as she was polishing the stove; and as for her eyes! well, the very medical student from Guy's Hospital said, "Moleskin, old man, it was deuced providential she was not blinded out and out."

And even when he forgot the quarter of an ounce of best cayenne pepper left lying in the scale, and



actually sent it in mixed up with a quarter of ground coffee to my great-aunt Mowler, from whom I had, in a limited sense, expectations, which brought on a fit of coughing for three hours without stopping, and caused her to give up coming to my house, and to alter her will—even then, as I found I got on pretty well without her society, and she has only an annuity of fifty-two pounds, paid weekly in advance, and is, as she herself boasts, a martyr to cramps, which draws the calves of her legs into true-lovers' knots, not that I have ever seen these muscular devices, which require seven shillings' worth of gin a week to keep them below her knees, I forgave him that also.

Indeed, he might have stayed on with me until I gave up business, and perhaps with my successor till now, but for the Dialectic Debating Society, where one night he was clever and stupid enough to shut up Tomkiss, one of my best customers, though otherwise disagreeable, so effectually that he never entered my shop again, but dealt at Stores', and all through politics. The ridiculous question that night was, "Which was the greater Prime Minister, Lord Beaconsfield or Mr. Gladstone?" Tomkiss supported Lord B. and his Peace



with Honor, and the Suez Canal Shares, and so on; while Roger naturally upheld Mr. G. and his Grocers' Wine License, and cheap claret, and so forth. And as none of those present had perhaps even seen any Suez stock, while most of them knew our Gladstone claret pretty well, Roger fairly carried the meeting with him when he declared that the man who brought cheap claret into the domestic circle must be the greatest statesman Britain ever had. And as one word leads to another, Tomkiss retorted with "Fiddlesticks' ends! Don't call poisoning the masses with bad liquor statesmanship. Disraeli was a great statesman, and Gladstone is only a great politician," and much more equally to the point. I understand the subsequent proceedings were almost as lively as those of the Lower House at its lowest, that is, on an Irish field night.

I was greatly exasperated at this loss of a good account, paid as punctually as I could wish, and all through such folly as politics, which should always be kept out of any well-conducted business, especially grocery. I felt that if Roger stayed I should soon not have a Conservative customer left in the world, though their ready money was as good as Radicals',



and their quarterly accounts much safer; so no party politics for me. As fate happened, a few nights after he had been arguing my connection away there, I received a book-post parcel, addressed only to me, his name having been accidentally, or it may be on purpose, to put me on my guard, omitted. The address being Timothy Moleskin, Esq., which is not my usual style, itself looked suspicious, for in those days, whenever I got esquired instead of mistered, it was by someone who wanted to get something out of me, either a subscription, or a loan, or, which is the same thing, only more honest, an out and out gift of money.

Inside it was printed "Declined with thanks." Now as I never knew anyone decline anything I offered him, being generally eager to accept indeed, I was utterly puzzled; but it turned out to be some essay, or article, of Roger's own writing; and when I taxed him with it, telling him I never did such a thing in my life, and could not have believed him capable of it, as I thought only authors could write books and such things, he said, "Oh, Mr. Moleskin, sir, everyone can write what he knows, sir, and feels within him, sir; you could write, sir; I can write, sir. Oh, yes, sir." After this I saw



there was nothing for it but to part with him, wishing him every success, and hoping he might have his health.

Naturally, I thought no more of Roger's words at the time, being still in business, and not expecting ever to see him again; but latterly, when I found many thoughts respecting my late revered partner in life filling my mind, and, as it were, seeking utterance, I fancied that, as I had quite retired, with an exceedingly reasonable competency too, for me to give expression to my mixed feelings in a pamphlet, or even a little book, did not seem so wholly improper. Still I foresaw such serious, if not insuperable, educational difficulties in the task, owing to my not having been brought up to the business of authorship—though as to my early education, filial gratitude compels me to state that I spent eight of the longest years of my life at a select academy for young gentlemen which prepared for the universities, and there cost my respected father pounds and pounds of tea and coffee, and hundredweights of sugar, besides a good round sum in hard cash each term to balance the account,—I perceived, I repeat, such obstacles in my way that I do not suppose I should have made the attempt to enshrine even the first of my good ladies in print



had not Mr. Trotwell quite unexpectedly turned up again, as follows:

Effie, as we now call her, though Euphemia in the former Mrs. Mole-skin's time, our parlor maid at Tooting Beck, the genteel part of Wandsworth, where we now live, having completely retired from shopkeeping more than two years ago, is as decent a servant girl as ever was turned out of a Board School, and I do not wish to say a word against her, as she is almost sure to read this book if she discovers that it is about her late and present mistresses. Indeed, she reads a great deal, having a young Scotch baker for her sweetheart, and, as I may say, literary adviser. Only a few weeks back I overheard him talking to her about some new book, and saying, "Eh, Effie, lassie, wow! but it's aye an unco' guid book to read, and ye sud juist beg the loan o't"; for as Mr. Cowper, the poet, sung, "Although on pleasure he was bent, he had a frugal mind."

But, to proceed, Effie, though cleanly, truthful, honest, and obliging, as described in her character, and so found to be, has at least one failing common to her class, that of speaking somewhat indistinctly, by reason of what my previous spouse termed hereditary abbreviated pronunciation, derived from her father,



railway porter at the small rural station Leasowes Oatlands, which for ten years he always announced as Sowstlands, and here Euphemia acquired and cultivated the habit of contracting disagreeably long words into much shorter ones, by the omission of from two to four of the offending syllables, only the fittest surviving; and also of jumbling up shorter and simpler words into mysterious, misleading compounds. Hence when one morning she appeared to say, "Miss Trogetwell, sir," I did not associate the name with anyone in particular, and could only inquire, but as distinctly as possible:

"What is the young lady like, Effie? and what is her business?"

"Which," she replied, "I think it's a clergyman, sir."

"Oh! show him in," said I, getting out my purse; when, lo and behold! my former shopman, now the Rev. Mr. Roger Trotwell, in a stiff all-rounder collar, an M. B. vest, and the straightest cut black frock coat I ever saw, except at the play, with a soft felt headdress to match, which lay a limp, puckered heap when he put it down.

How all this came about he told us at tea and supper some weeks after, and it will appear in its due place later on, but meanwhile I want



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only to explain how it was I came to make out these accounts of my two good ladies, first and second. After he had paid the usual personal compliments, condolences, and congratulations, and we had put the customary sanitary inquiries to each other, and had begun to talk conversation, I told him I reproached myself with little or nothing in reference to the departed Mrs. Moleskin except that there had been no MEMOIR worthily setting forth some of the many excellences of so remarkable a woman. I had once hoped the Rev. Ewman Purecult himself might have written some little thing, say, after the tone of the epitaphs by old Maudler, given hereafter, and I went to moot it with him; but as I did not see him on the sad business until after I had given up my pew and subscription, because I went to a proper Church of England again, he as good as told me he looked upon me as only a natural man, divested of sheep's clothing, and an unplucked brand, with several other severe Scriptural epithets, which from his complacent air and rapt expression I took to be yet more cutting, but which I did not clearly understand, my knowledge of these subjects being, alas, but limited, so that they were in a great measure thrown away on me, and hurt my



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feelings less than they properly should have done. But it was certain no eulogistic, nor even appreciative, MEMOIR was to be expected from that quarter. Then I thought I might draw up some slight, imperfect notice of Mrs. M. myself to give to the world, and I began to do so, but soon found the task so much harder than it appeared to be on my first contemplating it that I abandoned the idea, finding I could not properly make out my own meaning more than three days after I had written it out; and though I cannot spell even well enough for a Bee now, in spite of my having taken a prize for ORTHOGRAPHY at the school at which I was not educated, because we all had to receive prizes for something, our parents expecting this as part of the curriculum, and the proprietor considering a handsomely bound prize the cheapest, best, and most permanent advertisement of his academy; as indeed it proved to be in my own case, my prize being "Walker," which was at once laid on the shelf, and is there still. Though I cannot spell very much now, as I was saying when interrupted by an early reminiscence, I do not undervalue spelling, or orthography as we then called it, and I still retain sufficient of its rudiments to know that if I spell a word two



different ways on the same page one of them at least must be wrong, and perhaps both may be. "There seemed to be no uniformity about my spelling, you see, Mr. Trotwell; but rather variety," said I.

"Mr. Moleskin," said Roger—I should say Rev. Mr. Trotwell, as he now was, "such an obituary notice as would do full justice to your late devoted, and now forever departed, lady could come from no pen so fittingly as from your own, sir—from no other. You alone, sir, enjoyed that close intimacy with the deceased which is essential to such a—such a performance; Mr. Moleskin, you alone were her husband——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Trotwell; she had previously fought the battle of life with Mr. Masterman: I was her second. She became a widow before she was a truly respected wife, to me, I mean."

"Certainly, my dear sir, but I refer now only to the period to which I am referring. You sustained in your turn the near relationship of a husband to her; you were in fact a second husband to Mrs. Moleskin, and as you are the survivor, you are the fittest to write her memoir. And all you require, sir, is that someone accustomed to struggle with the commoner and what I would term me-



chanical difficulties of composition, such as orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, should you care to write poetry, in short the intricacies of grammar, should edit your work."

He then went on to tell me that he had lately read in some literary journal, called either *Snip Snaps* or *Scrip Scraps*, I cannot remember which, a most instructive half-guinea prize Essay, on Editors, which stated that, although the Latin poet Horace, whom I knew very well by name, and even by sight, at school, though, as I stuck to the Lower Commercial division, I had no opportunity to make his further, even speaking, acquaintance. But, after all, how few schoolboys ever do grow up into schoolmen. Although, then, continued the prize essayist, this Horace, perhaps wishing to have this market to himself, strongly advised persons who wrote things to keep their compositions by them for nine years for corrections, modern authors could not afford to do this, but must serve up theirs hot and hot, as inspired, and especially journalists, the hotter the better, because here it was a regular race to get first, if only by five minutes, the printer promptly seizing the foremost, and letting the devil take the hindmost, who could then only read, an hour after, what he himself might



have written, but much better had his pen and cab flown a trifle faster.

The Editor, therefore, nowadays occupies the place of the old long delay of Horatian times, and is the coolest, most Rhadamanthine critic possible, and a literary despot withal: whom he will he slays, and whom he will he keeps alive; whom he will he sets up, in what type he will, and whom he will he puts down; but even when he does keep alive, and set up, still cutting out most of the good things, the bits of fat, so to speak, which is, no doubt, the reason we find so few of them, and the very bones and sinews sometimes; and thus the writer, being sorely mortified, generally considers his work wantonly disfigured, feeling that he could cheerfully have spared anything they have left untouched if they had not struck out just what he himself should have kept in. Indeed, an average editor will prune away ten times as much in nine minutes as the writer himself would have done in the whole nine years; and the author has therefore only to write with the utmost fury of which he is capable, and trust his editor to correct with all the requisite phlegm; under such conditions an author cannot be too furious.

Still, I did not see how I could write this memoir, as I wanted to say



my own say in my own words and manner, that the little book might be truly my own. Any mere tinkering with spelling and such like I did not mind, but the body of it, and the spirit of it too, for that matter, ought to be mine alone. But Mr. Trotwell then explained to me that there were two very distinct varieties of editors: those who paid the author, more or less, and so could chop him up as they liked, and those who were paid by the author, more or less, and had therefore only to follow his instructions, which of course would be, to leave out nothing and alter as little as possible. This was just what I desired, and I at once bethought me of Mr. Phewfees as the very man for an editor of the second variety, being a scholar in spelling, etc., etc., and yet happily having some little leisure left him in the pursuit of his arduous profession, law.

One other obstacle remained, but this I did not consult young Trotwell about, feeling it to be of rather too delicate a nature, as relating to the second Mrs. Moleskin. But over and over again I asked myself the question, "How will poor dear Tilly like to read anything respectful, regardful, perhaps eulogistic, about her late predecessor? Now, I know I was only a grocer, though fairly success-



ful, and I am little better now, having still a grocer's heart and mind, though I have done all I could of late years to cultivate both, as much as a middle-aged man may do in learning from books and a living paragon, and I do not pretend to have the fine sentiments of my betters, of ladies and gentlemen who have been well schooled and trained when young. Still I was long and greatly troubled on that point, I mean, betwixt my respect and consideration for the memory of my deceased good lady, and my tender love for her immediate successor. The existing Mrs. Moleskin is so sadly amiable, so kind-hearted and forgiving, that if she were wounded in her deepest feelings she would not let me see it, far less throw me a black look, or an angry, reproachful word; and how then could I do aught which might chance to grieve so gentle and loving a heart as this? Brooding over this aspect of the matter, it suddenly came to me, like a flash, and I do not to this day know from whence, Why not write a chapter about your dear second wife as well? It would be a pleasant surprise to her: which consideration settled the whole affair at once. But it will be no surprise after all, for I found it impossible to keep anything a secret from her which I

thought it would please her to know; and she has actually seen some small portions of her own part, though not of the earlier one, because she would have wanted to turn all the adjectives in praise of the first Mrs. Moleskin from positive into superlative, regardless of grammar, and perhaps, sometimes even of strict accuracy.

And that is all I have to tell as to how I came to write about my two wives.







## MY TWO WIVES.

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### PART I.

#### MY FIRST WIFE, BY HER SECOND HUSBAND.

**F**ROM a soiled, faded, and crumpled piece of paper, evidently torn out of an old diary once belonging to the dear deceased first Mrs. Moleskin, now carefully treasured up among her relics by me, her bereaved widower, I gather that she had herself once contemplated giving to the world such a record of her own life as could alone have been worthy of it and her. The front page of this sole remaining leaf is headed—THURSDAY, January 1, 1885; the back page—FRIDAY, January 2, 1885; it must therefore have been on or between these dates that she formed and recorded this intention. She was at that time still a

relict, and if she had then taken her own life into her own hand, what a portrait of herself would she not have produced; with how firm and masterly a touch would she have painted for posterity the filial Sauncoore, the connubial Masterman. Alas, in throwing away herself on myself, and abandoning projected autobiography for repeated matrimony, this most admirable woman deprived the world of her life, and left to me the painful duty of writing a very brief history of her second period of conjugal felicity only. It was while she was still in the intermediate state, and shortly before she entered into those endearing relations with me which came to an end in our connubial alliance that she formed, and for a short time entertained the idea of becoming her own biographer.

How thoroughly she would have carried out her purpose, may be seen from her preliminary announcement, as follows:

“THURSDAY, January 1, 1885.

“10 A. M. mem. Write book? ‘Recollections (query reminiscences?) of Life and Times of Priscilla Masterman, *née* Sauncoore.’ Must think of this.

“2 P. M.—Will certainly write my life and times, etc., etc. Scheme of



proposed book. Four periods or heads: Infancy, youth, married state, bereaved ditto. Say, four heads under four hoods, viz., childhood, maidenhood, wifehood, and widowhood. Greatly taken with idea of life, etc.

“FRIDAY, January 2, 1885.

“4 P. M.—Much discouraged to find on inquiry that most books bring in such large losses. Am told, book no good unless writer have already made a name. Query—How to make a name? Must think this out. Meanwhile, is life worth writing? Fear not.”

Mrs. Masterman's designs on her Life seem to have stopped abruptly at this point. Instead of making a name by literature she kindly took mine, which was ready-made for her; and so it devolves upon her late husband to proceed with his slight imperfect sketch of her second married life.

Those who know the premises so long, and I trust I may add creditably, occupied by me, No. 37 Lower High Street, St. Kitt's, Southwark, will remember that my old shop was the very last to retain the small-paned windows, in heavy oak-painted frames, gently bulging out toward the street, precisely, in fact, as my father and grandfather had had them, though



all the surrounding shops, especially the other grocers', were one by one fitted, first with fair-sized panes of crown glass, and later on with great single sheets of plate. Mogley, one of my hands, not the superficial-faced young man, but the youth with the large nose, of whom Trotwell used to say that, as some stout people had double chins, so Mogley was double-nosed instead—Mogley always grumbled at having to clean so many little panes, the principle of window cleaning being to take care of the corners of the panes, when the centers will take care of themselves, and so these little squares required twenty times as much time and trouble to clean as one or two good sheets would. And the travelers, too, all said the frames quite spoiled the works of art they sent round as show cards and window bills, to say nothing of the many ledges they made for the dead flies to lay themselves out on, as though at a public mortuary. But somehow I could not bear the thought of parting with the old front, shutters and all, though now that I have been out of it more than two years 37 has the biggest and brightest windows in all Lower High Street.

At the far end of the shop inside was a small window opening into the counting house, as we called it in the



business, though in the house it was always spoken of as the parlor, because we had all our meals there, although there was a drawing room dining room over the shop, looking into the street, with rows of scarlet geraniums on the window sills, where my mother always sat, and had her friends up to tea, and used latterly to have even her dinner sent up on a tray, the old lady becoming infirm, though as vigorous as ever in her mind, and continually making me renew the promise of my youth, never to marry as long as she lived, just as she had waited three years for my grandmother to die, the house not being big enough to hold two mistresses, as indeed few are, and she being too old for a new home. She said she should not like to see my wife live anywhere but over the shop, as my mother and grandmother had done before I was born, to go no further back. As it was really my mother's business, stock, good will, and everything, there seemed a good deal of reason in what she said, and so her wish was naturally law to a son who had been brought up to be dutiful as I had, and never brought a father's or mother's gray hairs with sorrow to a grave in my life, and that is why I was still single at forty-one, which surely may be considered a year of



discretion, if ever. Had I known that my dear, good mother, who said she felt herself fast breaking up when I first engaged myself to her, I mean matrimonially, as above, would have lived exactly sixteen years longer, I might not have been so ready to promise, though I hope as honorable in keeping it when once given; for it is little use to give your promise unless you keep it also. In a general way, indeed, my mother herself did not approve of long engagements, but she regarded my case as an exception.

The little room which so patly connected our business toils with our domestic pleasures and comforts—of which the meal time is certainly one of the chief in a busy retail trade, with unusually long hours in consequence of tea and coffee for early breakfasters, and potted snacks for late suppers, whatever it may be in the wholesale, of which I have no personal knowledge—besides having its two doors, one opening into the shop, the other into the dwelling house, had also two windows, the smaller one, of which I have already spoken, the lower half of which could be raised so as to admit of free communication with my hands, commercials, and even the more familiar and friendly sort of customers, for although, I am thankful to say, there was a goodish



share of the lower masses and the poorer people in that neighborhood, and, on the whole, perhaps the most profitable branch of the trade in the long run, I am very proud to say our connection lay mainly with the upper classes, such as the neighboring tradesmen, and genteel families in general, including their lodgers.

The other window, which was of exactly the same pattern, but with twelve panes instead of four, opened direct into the fresh air, overlooking indeed—though only when open—not only our own yard, a matter of a good ten feet in length, but also that at the end of it, and the back of the house to which this belonged, which must have been at least fourteen or fifteen feet long, because it was always described as the garden at the back when that house was to let; and I myself well remember when there was a dead lilac bush in the middle of it, which my mother said once used to have some leaves on it almost every spring, and one year they even thought it was going to flower, and some would have it that it really did; but my mother said, No, it was only a lavender-colored thread glove that someone had hung on it for a joke.

The view at the back not being very cheerful, this window, by which our parlor counting house was lighted,



was composed of ground glass, with a border of yellow, and corners of bright blue, which gave a very dim, not irreligious light, rather depressing, and inclining to seriousness, except when on a sunny morning it happened to throw a blue or yellow patch on my revered mother's nose or cheek, and I had to draw the blind down that she might not see me laughing, and that I might pretend not to see the hands doing so, to prevent unpleasantness, which is always a hindrance to business, besides being disagreeable. However, when the weather was fine, and warm enough, and the sun had got round a bit, we could pull the top sash down a foot or two, and many and many a time have I looked up from my books, and seen the white clouds scudding across the blue sky, just like dear old Margate itself, or the stars at night shining away beautifully, as if they were fifty miles from Southwark.

Now it happened one day that not being able to get an invoice quite straight, though the mistake was not ours, but the drysalter's, I was staring at the small shop window, as I commonly do when bothered over an account, though sometimes at the larger one, when I suddenly observed the figure of Mrs. Masterman just entering the shop, and so went for-



ward to make my respectful duty to her as a pretty constant, though but small, customer, and to hope I saw her well. And having taken her order, and passed such remarks on the weather as it suggested, and so forth, as are proper to a lady from her family grocer, little thinking of the honor, not to say pleasure, in store for me, though I anticipated, I had, of course, no more to say, beyond opening the door for her to go out, and "Good-morning, mum."

Still, nothing important nor interesting took place on that immemorable occasion except that I thought her a particularly intelligent lady, for a woman, that is, and more than ordinarily civil to a mere retail tradesman, though, of course, known to be well-to-do. But this interview might never have led to anything, in spite of my mother having been dead more than a year, though I had noticed that since that embargo, so to speak, was taken off me, many single girls of all ages up to half a century, and even a number of widows, for the most part quite ineligible, had begun to pay their addresses to me, more or less openly, dealing with me even more freely than before. And this could not be carried altogether to the credit of my hands, apart from the head, though no doubt each hand secretly



thought so, because they usually came when I was myself about; and often, when I was out of sight in the counting house, I would hear one of them ask for a quarter of two and four—which I could honestly recommend, both for body and flavor—and then see her go out as quiet as possible, and within an hour after, when I was in front, come mincing in again, as innocent and demure as you please, and walk right up to me with “Oh, Mr. Moleskin, you *will* think me a foolish silly, but I find I quite forgot,” etc., etc., and would give me a list of seven or eight articles, coming to from three and six to four shillings. Not being blind, though not an unduly vain man either, I could not fail to observe these wiles, and at times, when they came thicker than usual, I fancied I could have taken my choice of nearly all the young ladies in St. Kitt’s, not to go outside my own parish, and particularly of those who were no longer mere giddy chits, by which I mean sensible girls of five and thirty and onward.

Still what really brought the first Mrs. Moleskin and myself together in what afterward became the bonds of holy wedlock was by no means so romantic an incident as I could have wished to relate, being indeed of a very commonplace



character, and nothing less than a drunken, or perhaps I should rather say drunk, conductor, as it was proved before the magistrate next morning by witnesses to character of unimpeachable respectability and veracity that he was a notoriously sober man, who had been sunstruck in the hay field some years ago, and never again yielded to temptation, so that when he did have a glass or two of half and half, just to cheer him up a little, his mother-in-law lying a corpse unburied at home, as the best of us might, it took an unusual effect; and he was eventually fined five shillings, which his worship hoped—sincerely, but almost hopelessly, hoped—would be a warning to him, and convert him into at least a moderate teetotaler.

Our more intimate acquaintance-ship, which afterward ripened into maturity, came about, then, as follows: It happened that Mrs. Masterman, returning one evening from an afternoon tea at Camberwell, entered an omnibus at the Elephant and Castle, whether London General or Road Car is immaterial, and therefore need not be stated, the one being every whit as civil, obliging, and well conducted as the other, and the fares exactly alike. Suffice it to say, Mrs. Masterman took the first omnibus she



could to reach her home, and was just getting out at her journey's end, with that dignified deliberation which characterized all her movements, even in public vehicles, which try ladies' dignity and repose perhaps more than anything, busy crossings only excepted, when the conductor, catching sight of a passing rival omnibus, urged her to greater haste, calling out, "Hurry up, sweet and twenty; do come along, mum!" Mrs. Masterman, being then a lady in the prime of middle-aged life, was greatly upset, and the more so as a number of rude people laughed outright at this piece of low chaff; but one elderly gentleman venturing to remonstrate with the uncivil fellow, not, of course, knowing that he was in liquor, and insober, and being a bland-looking man of some years, dressed in black, with a good-tempered smile, the conductor at once turned on him with all the abusive slang in his ribald vocabulary, telling him he looked like a mute at a wedding, etc., etc., and so on. The old gentleman was terribly put about, as he well might be, and gasped out that he should certainly report him, at the same time pulling out an envelope to take his number, though so flurried, and his hand shaking so much, that he could scarcely hold his pencil case,



let alone make a good figure. But the mere sight of the paper roused, so to say, all the old Adam in the inebriated young man, who forthwith covered up his badge, threatened to knock the old gentleman's goggles into his eyes, told him to go to, etc., etc., and, in fine, caused the driver to pull up with horror, he being himself fairly sober. A policeman here strolled up, and the poor lady and her trembling champion got out of the omnibus, and told the civil policeman, who wished to have their names and addresses, that they did not want to be taken before the magistrate.

As my shop was within three minutes' walk, Mrs. Masterman, being greatly agitated, said she would turn into it, and recover herself before she proceeded to her home; and the old gentleman, though far worse upset than she, not being gifted with her remarkable strength of mind and moral courage, accompanied her thither; but went away as soon as he decently could, glad, no doubt, to be rid of the whole affair.

I was much shocked to see one of my most respectable customers in such a perturbed state, and to hear her broken accents as she unfolded the disconnected tale of her ill treatment; but I am glad to say I retained enough presence of mind to fetch our



own spirit case, with some good French brandy in it, from the drawing room, though we had plenty of British close handy in the parlor; for although I am, I trust, as true a patriot as any grocer can be, I own I think the French far better than the British, particularly in faintings, and illness in general, as a rule.

Up to that time I had always looked upon Mrs. Masterman as a mighty superior and stand-off sort of a lady, and I was astonished to find how deeply approachable she could make herself when she chose, sipping the small glass of cold brandy and water quite gratefully, and talking most affably, so that, it being close upon our shutting up, I felt emboldened to say she was still too much alarmed to go home alone, and I should feel honored to have the pleasure of seeing her safely there, and even to offer her my arm, little thinking my hand would soon follow, which she accepted very graciously, and leant on it too, though very lightly and gingerly, as became a widow of discretion.

But when I got back to 37, what with the reaction after the exciting scene, and the gas being turned down to one small jet in the counting house, I never felt so dull and lonely since the evening after my dear mother's funeral, when I got home to bed, hav-



ing had supper at my uncle's; and I thought how lonesome a bachelor is when he is by himself, his hands at the reading room or airing themselves, the gas low, and a superior middle-aged widow lady having just left the premises. I could not help pouring myself out a small glass of the French brandy, with some water, and as I drank it off, not wishing my hands to catch me tippling, as it were, I pictured to myself a comfortable wife, and perhaps some children also, to keep house while I kept shop. And then the young men came in, and had their bread and cheese, with the usual beer, and then went to bed. And so this to me eventful day came to an end, for I thereupon ceased dreaming, and went to sleep, that sound, deep, dreamless sleep, the guerdon of bodily labor, which is so truly sweet. For, indeed, such sleep is to me ever the end of an outworn day's life, and the morning's waking the beginning of a new day's life.

Not that I had even in my wide-awake dream imaged Mrs. Masterman as the first Mrs. Moleskin. Oh, dear, no; my wildest, most ambitious hopes did not at that early stage soar to such a sublime height as that. So far as I recollect of the matter, the ideal comfortable wife I pictured in



my fancy was a sort of compound of the best points of all the nice girls I knew, with a little of each and not too much of any, forming thus a highly improbable, if not wholly impossible, she.

The next morning I could but send, with my best respects, to hope Mrs. Masterman felt no worse for the annoyance; to which she replied, with her compliments, that she was quite recovered, and could not sufficiently thank Mr. Moleskin for his most kind and welcome attentions. Now this was much, very much, from a lady of such staid and even frigid deportment as she. True, she was a widow, but being such, she was not as other widows often are, free and easy of manners, nay, well nigh skittish; in many of whom have I amazedly seen carryings on which might cause any sensible living man to say, "Thank goodness, that is not my widow."

The ice being thus broken, though I do not say thawed, Mrs. Masterman being a lady of such gelid temperament and reserved bearing as to render intimacy difficult, and familiarity impossible, I was thereafter received by her rather as a humble friend than a mere family grocer, as heretofore. Now although a youngish middle-aged man might easily enough fall in



love, as the phrase runs, with a widow indeed old enough to be his senior, I certainly did not fall into this state with my subsequent wife; I rather rose into it by regular gentle gradations. Pity is indeed said to be akin to love, and after such an encounter most women would have been in at least a pitiable condition, and even she was not wholly unmoved by her adventure; but she retained sufficient dignity under her misfortune to evoke humble admiration of her fortitude rather than mere maudlin pity; she was not a woman to be pitied. Far be it from me to say that my late espoused good lady was a being whom it was absolutely impossible to pity, but it was extremely difficult to do so, and any attempt to express even polite sympathy had to be made with delicate discretion.

Those who have the privilege to have known the first Mrs. Moleskin will believe me when I avow that I was not foolishly smitten and carried away, either, by her personal charms, which indeed had somewhat waned, and were still on the wane, when I had the honor of being permitted to pay her those respectful, assiduous attentions which I will not profane by calling mere courtship. Her appearance was not strikingly prepossessing at that time, whatever it may



have been in her earlier youth, when, as I have often heard from her own revered lips, she had received many compliments on her eyes, cheeks, hair, and facial charms in general, all which she duly despised then, and remembered with yet greater contempt now. She also had to a certain extent the so-called advantage of myself in age, as indeed in all other things, save that sordid one of worldly possessions, as I discovered only after our union in the, in former days, indissoluble bands of wedlock, for she never obtruded mercenary considerations during the payment of my addresses, if I may so term our prenuptial intercourse.

No, the attractions of my excellent first wife were mental, intellectual, not facial and corporeal. Her cabinet photograph, taken shortly before our marriage, at my urgent request, as a companion to my own, stands before me; and were I an artist, or even a portrait painter, I would limn in words a speaking likeness of the late lamented lady; but I feel my prosaic, but rigidly truthful, pen could not worthily depict her. Still, as I know the reader will desire to have some materials wherewith to picture a Mrs. Masterman for himself, I will essay a descriptive idea or two, a sort of correct inventory of her features,



mainly from memory, partly also from the photograph, which everyone says did not do justice to the original, a universal failing of photographs, and is already considerably faded, also after their usual custom having turned a bilious straw color, which causes the deceased lady to seem to look on life with a jaundiced cheek.

Those who recollect the departed when my wife, or even while yet the widow of her late husband, will remember that her singular mental powers and moral qualities were embodied in a fitting material frame of fair, if not rather portly, dimensions. Slightly massive in body and mind, her step was appropriately firm, and her deportment modestly self-assertive, except of course after an escape from an inebriated conductor, or some similar scene. As she herself remarked to her former landlord over the vexed question of repairs, only three or four weeks after our marriage, she was not a woman to be imposed upon, or dictated to by any man, living or dead; no, not by poor, dear Mr. Masterman himself, who was the best husband any woman ever buried.

If I may be suffered, it will come easier to me to take the features in their natural order, from the hair steadily down, so that I may not omit



any of them. Mrs. Masterman wore her own personal hair, which had formerly been of a dark glossy brown, but was latterly slightly sobered down by a few delicate streaks of gray, which imparted to her a not unbecoming air of precocious venerability. It was arranged in curls, not small and wiry, as might be those of some pretty, vixenish helpmate; not luxuriantly wavy, as those of a society beauty; nor yet fantastic ringlets, as of a girlish wifelet; but two large, firm-set, solid curls, such as one seldom sees in our degenerate age, save in a hairdresser's window as specimens of possibilities in the art of curling. So rigidly faultless, in fact, were they that many persons took them for false, thinking them too good for nature. Her high, expansive forehead betokened the brain of a woman who knew the rights of her gentle sex, and would have them, or know why not. But how shall I describe those dark, piercing eyes, undoubtedly the most characteristic feature in her whole countenance? They were thought-reading eyes, possessing the peculiarity—not altogether attractive to imperfect, more or less peccadillo-conscious people, such as many human persons are, even though, to outward seeming, ladies and gentlemen about as good



as their neighbors—of appearing not only to peer into one's heart, spying out its secret thoughts, but even to look quite through one's person, and to be fixed, or, as it were, focused, on some point from five to eight feet beyond, according to the conscious culpability of the subject; a mere optico-moral delusion, of course, but vivid and distressing enough while it lasted. I am sure I have sometimes felt, when she suddenly turned the searchlight of her gaze directly through me, just as though I were really a hardened culprit detected in some crime which I had not committed, and was basely, but futilely, trying to conceal; a disagreeable, abject sensation, truly.

Her nose was set in a bold Roman type. Her mouth indicated much true firmness of character, being surmounted by a deep upper lip, and supported by a massive, if not too massive, lower jaw and square chin. The entire countenance, whose principal features I have described above, was animated by a severely intellectual expression, always worn by her out of doors, and very often within. Humbly individually, I have reason to think that a too severely intellectual expression enhances the charms of but few female faces, or indeed male; but I venture this



strictly personal opinion with due diffidence.

In my rough sketch I have purposely refrained from trying to draw the late Mrs. Moleskin's teeth, which, however, were conspicuously white and even; and I have done so because she herself for some reason disliked all public reference to this important constituent of feminine loveliness. She once told me, I remember, that in the present day in the best society teeth were quite a family secret, not to be divulged outside; that, in fact, well-bred people have no teeth, that is, none to speak of; and no lady singer, music player, nor even actress would on any account allude to her teeth, though making no pretense of mystery about her complexion, nor how she comes by it. But, as that shrewd deceased lady would oftentimes say, "After all, beauty is only skin deep, and not always that: especially professional beauty."

The readers will doubtless long ere this have realized that my former wife, whose loss I now have to deplore, was an exceedingly superior person, standing, indeed, so high above the ordinary standard of her sex as to be an altogether unfit partner in life for such as I; and this, as I have not sought to disguise, being



also my own deep-seated conviction, the question pertinently arises, How, then, did I come to marry this paragon of manly wisdom and female worth? And to this question there is in truth but one answer: I did not do so; she married me. True, I did once conceive the preposterous idea of marrying her; nay, so foolish and vain was I that I did not even stifle the young idea at its very birth, but allowed it to live on and perish by natural death. Well do I remember the time and circumstances of my first forming, and briefly entertaining it. I was shaving—and here I may remark that I have often observed this somewhat delicate operation to be extremely favorable to the conception of new and original ideas; perhaps, as Roger, now Rev., Trotwell used to think, because we usually shave early in the day, when the mind, refreshed by sleep, is alert and vigorous; or, as Mogley suggested, because we are not yet wide awake, and carry our sleeping fancies into real life. I know not; but I feel sure I could never have had a thought of marrying Mrs. Masterman during business hours, still less have indulged it, no, not even if I had been shaving then.

Springing up unbidden, unexpected, unannounced, just as I had



made a clean sweep of one side of my beard, the bare idea seemed to me so bold and almost indecent that I actually blushed, and by the side of the snowy lather my clean-shaved cheek turned a rosy red. I do not know when I blushed before, if ever. Certainly never before had such a wildly absurd notion presented itself to my matter-of-fact mind even under the stimulus of shaving. The nearest approach to it was when it suddenly occurred to me one morning that what with the comfortable little property my worthy father had left us, my mother being still alive, and our own small savings, close cut as grocery now is too, I might some day retire and live as a gentleman, which so tickled my fancy that I must have grinned right out, for I cut a great gash in my lip, the smart of which soon brought me to my sober senses again.

Common justice to myself compels me to mention that before the roseate hue had wholly faded from my cheek and ears I had promptly banished the presumptuous thought of a lady of Mrs. Masterman's exalted intellect and virtues stooping to unite herself with one in my humble retail sphere, however respectable and prosperous.

Mrs. Masterman graciously married



me. Her reasons for thus constituting herself my personally conducting guide, domestic philosopher, and matrimonial candid friend must ever remain shrouded in the inscrutable mystery in which she left them. As she did everything on principle, I have no doubt she married me on principle. When Tomkiss, whom I met casually, said, with unwarrantable rudeness and familiarity, "Ha, Moleskin, my old Benedick, so Mrs. Masterman is going to quarter herself on you, is she? and a jolly comfortable berth for the old girl too. Well, old man, I wish you joy, I do; but you'll have to give her her head, you know, or by jingo she'll take it," I was struck speechless with horror at the application of such a highly objectionable epithet as "old girl" to a lady barely middle-aged, as ladies now go, and moreover, so respectable as my intended, or, rather, intender.

On reflection, too, I could not but perceive that there was a covert insinuation that Mrs. Masterman was marrying me for my money, a mercenary consideration unworthy of any disinterested female. This troubled me so much that though I could not for worlds have bluntly said to her—even within a few hours of our approaching wedding day, and when I got on as familiar terms with her as



her exceptionally correct temperament would permit anyone to be—"Mrs. Masterman, are you marrying me for house, home, and money?" I did venture the day before our nuptials to say, "My dear"—for she objected to the superlative, and the comparative was grammatically inapposite, besides having an invidious sound—"my dear Mrs. Masterman, may I, in view of the happy event looming in the morrow, may I ask you what it was—I mean, whatever—no, I mean, what was it that really induced you to marry one whose merits are so much inferior to—that is, who is so every way unworthy of you?" With no unseemly relaxation of her natural dignity, but with a half-suppressed smile, she replied, "Oh, Mr. Moleskin, can you ask me?" and I at once said, "No, I could not." It would have been chargeable with indelicacy to have attempted to pry into motives possibly too tender, perhaps too deep, for utterance; Mrs. Masterman even on the verge of her second wedding was no vulgar sweetheart, to be cross-examined and re-examined by her intended.

Some hypercaptious critic may feel, and go on to express, surprise that I have not given full details of our courtship, such details as the



soul of the reader who reads only for amusement, not to improve his or her mind, loveth. It is because there was no courtship proper, common courtship, that is ; Mrs. Masterman was by no means a courtable widow. Those who have perused this memoir with the attention it deserves, I mean of course on account of its subject, not itself, must have observed that that subject was not, as, alas ! so many of her honored sex are, vain, giddy, loving, and even lovable things. Our acquaintanceship, gradually drawing closer and closer, finally closed into matrimony.

Very early in our intimacy it was quietly borne in upon my inmost consciousness that those trifling endearments which I had reason to believe usually pass between youthful master grocers and their choices, and are deemed orthodox by both parties, would not be acceptable to Mrs. Masterman, who avowed that she disliked to see her young fellow-creatures, as she would term them, thus raising them to her own level in the scale of being, pawing each other ; and she therefore very consistently discouraged, and even deprecated, any caressing of her own person. Being betrothed, she could suffer a kiss, which, she explained, was a symbol of great amity, often ex-



changed between males, especially by foreign gentlemen at railway stations, when parting from their hirsute compatriots for several days, and on similar distressing occasions. Much Adieu about nothing, she called it. But not even under stress of betrothment did she permit the act—the single, chaste, infrequent kiss, which she thus stamped, and quasi-sanctified with her approval, to become by repetition the habit—that is, to degenerate into kisses and prolonged kissing.

Our so-called courtship, then, was of the most refined and decorous character, resembling the academic intercourse between a female philosopher and a male disciple. It was serious and dignified, not the frivolous love-dallying of ordinary foolish lovers. This estimable, if not lovely, woman never stooped to folly. Sometimes, in the weakness of my merely male humanity, I might have fallen into an affianced familiarity, but a sternly pitying smile, a benignly solemn look, or an apt word from her at once recalled me to myself, or rather to her.

She usually addressed me as bare “Mr. Moleskin”; but, out of consideration, I presume, for my inferior intellectual and moral development, she allowed me to address her as



"Mrs. Masterman, my dear"; nay, even on some rare occasions, when our social relations were unusually close and confidential, simply as "my dear"; but I never abused that privilege. I take no credit to myself for this, for I scarcely think the most devoted, reckless young lover, who had got to know as much of her as was cognoscible, could have irreverently cut down Mrs. Masterman's Christian name into Prissy, still less Prilla. For myself I never called her by her full Christian name but once, and then only when the illness which, alas! eventually elevated this admirable woman to a sphere more worthy of her merits had much reduced her powers, and so depressed her toward the level of humanity at large. Then did I, once, quite unpremeditatedly, say, "Priscilla, dear." The unwonted, too familiar appellative was evidently most displeasing to her. I ever remembered the mildly reproving glance she cast on me, previously looking deprecatingly askance toward Euphemia, our housemaid, and it consoles me to reflect that never again were my chastened lips betrayed into such an offensive indiscretion.

Before I became intimate with this lady I had a foolish but becomingly modest conceit of myself, well realizing that my book learning, natural



abilities, and commercial status were all mediocre rather than prime, and I regarded myself as in no wise better than my neighbors, but still passable enough, and I pictured Mrs. Masterman as amiable, whereas she was really august, as a mere feeble woman, when in fact she possessed great mental strength and vigor, and was by no means the weaker vessel I imagined woman compared with man to be. Almost at our first interview I became aware of the ridiculous errors under which I had lain. Within one short hour her prodigious superiority to myself in all that constitutes true manliness had impressed itself upon me, and it was I who, even in my own partial eyes, was the weaker vessel. And I may honestly aver that in all our after intercourse I seldom spent ten quiet minutes in her company without feeling disagreeably conscious of a distinct, perceptible loss of self-esteem, as though virtue, or something of that kind, had gone out of me.

Fortunately my wife that was to be was fully prepared to overlook my many failings. A kind friend, I mean of hers, had pointed me out as a not wholly unfit successor to Mr. Masterman deceased, and she had resolved to marry me in spite of every imperfection.



Fate itself, too, must have doomed me to be made a happy man, for speedily realizing that I was no mate for a being so accomplished and wise, I secretly determined that I would not again enter that august presence alone. But she must have read my humble thought as we sat there, for before I was aware, and how I knew not, I found myself honored by an appointment to another audience; and this honor was conferred on me again and again. I am not a brave man, I boldly confess, but, when necessary, I can screw, and screw, and screw my faltering courage up to meet any man face to face. I do not, for obvious reasons, now say, or woman, and if any man reader hereof be wise he also in thus boasting will draw the line at woman, at least at widow-woman.

Listen: I made up my mind that I would no longer play the coward fool, and continue to trifle with one who was not to be trifled with. I was no fit suitor for that fair but superior hand; my next visit should be my last. I would, yes, that I would, release her from any claims she might fancy I might fancy I had upon her heart and hand. I came, I saw, I was conquered. It fell out thus: I went forth jauntily to within a few yards of her abode, but I own I



walked to and fro for seven minutes before I turned the corner, and put myself in sight of her door. (Please excuse the Rubicon, which has now quite run dry, so that I can easily skip it.) Retreat was then impossible; I boldly rushed forward, seized the knocker, and in what seemed to me no time the door was opened, and I was upstairs. My ordained wife was there.

I have now learnt from experience that any gentleman who has irrevocably made up his mind to renounce a lady to whom he has been paying, or from whom he has been receiving, attentions—put it between whom and himself attentions have passed—will be well advised to shun preliminary parley, and to walk straight up to her on entering the room, and at once apprise her of the fact. The gentleman who hesitates is most probably lost. For myself I sat and appeared to listen to some general, but highly instructive, observations, my very soul meanwhile being absorbed in dreadful forebodings, as the thought flashed across my consciousness that Mrs. Masterman might regard the very idea of my proposing to her as the sheerest impertinence, an arrogant folly of which no well-regulated grocer's mind could have been guilty, and as such to be resented accord-



ingly. But then the modest renunciation itself presupposed the impudent intention. A curious limpness all at once came over me; trains of thought, or, more correctly, a succession of unconnected thoughts, ran through my bewildered brain, and all I had ever heard or read of the horrors of man proposing to woman seemed to me but lightsome pleasures compared with those of him who is bent on avowing his purpose not to propose.

If I looked up, her calm, keen, judicial eye was obviously fixed on some point, as near as in my agitated state I could make out, about six feet behind me. I felt verily guilty, and, worse, detected. I made several abortive efforts to say something, however unsuited to the occasion, but only some incoherent words rewarded my attempts. I could not, of course, see my own face, but I am sure it must have exhibited in quick succession all the colors of Noah's ark.

Then the crisis arrived. Suddenly her glance seemed to say, "Down on your knees, unworthy one," and I instinctively knelt before my subsequent wife. Apparently she was not unprepared for my devotional attitude, nor even for my presumptuous weakness; for she deftly pieced my disjointed utterances into a lucid pro-



posal of marriage, quite formal, though appropriately fervent, which she graciously but unmistakably accepted. I know not how long I might have remained at her feet, but she herself raised me to my own. I fell into her arms, and resting on that noble bust, realized that she was mine—perhaps, rather, that I was hers. At all events, we were each other's, and that irrevocably and indissolubly, that is, until death, or divorce, us did part.

She then of her own will impressed a serene kiss on my treacherous lips, which had intended to betray her, and had so strangely betrayed myself instead. She had forgiven me, her kiss was a ratification of pardon; it was more, it was the signature to a treaty of peace; yet more, it was, as it were, the solemn, sacred seal to our marriage contract, giving it legal form and validity. I perceived all this in a moment of time, for she impressed this first kiss in a way which plainly said, "I deliver this as my act and deed." Did I take an unworthy advantage of my new position and rights as her accepted by imprinting, not one kiss only on those chaste lips, but a second, nay, even a third? How could I help doing so?

As I left her dear door, now of course quite the happy man, I must



have been greatly confused as to persons and things, for as the events of our interview revolved and re-revolved in my memory, an absurd hazy notion haunted me that I was about to become Mr. Masterman the second, though, of course, it was really the lady who was changing her name and becoming Mrs. Moleskin the first. As I recall the various incidents, and their unexpected, if happy, issue, I am ever more and more sure that if this marriage had not been arranged for me by a higher power I should never have become a bridegroom, that is to say, to the first, or, say, that first Mrs. Moleskin, nor would the widowed Mrs. Masterman have become a bride, that is, to me.

There was clearly no good in putting off the happy day, so I determined to consummate our felicity at as early a date as was convenient, the rather because Mrs. Masterman wished it. As she pithily put it, "This is a singularly changeful, uncertain world, and when two grown-up persons know their own minds, the sooner they are irrevocably united the better," and she even went on to add, "We shall be made one, Mr. Moleskin, because we are one, and shall be one evermore, shall we not?"

"Indeed, my dear Mrs. Master-



man," I replied, "I can answer only for myself. I think I shall always be one, and I hope you will always be one too, and then naturally we two shall both be one."

I was fain to leave the matter so, though it was not quite clear even to myself, the higher arithmetic being always beyond my powers, and as I find the more closely I study these things the more indistinct they get, I no longer muddle my head with such foolish matters, which can be of no practical use to anyone. My poor father made all his money without them, and I well remember, when I was only a boy, how the old governor would have a tutor to teach me mathematics, and Lord knows what, one winter holidays, which I thought hard on a lad home from school, with a long, sharp frost running too. He was a poor scholar, it seems, however, and I now believe my father had him more for the gentleman's own benefit than mine, as, indeed, it proved to be, and out of charity, as it were, though I mean no offense thereby. It struck me even then, and I have never forgotten it since, how differently the fee for his services was paid and received. Why, my father would hand him over a sovereign as easy and careless as possible, as much as to say there are plenty



more where that comes from, while he would take it and put it away in his shabby old purse as if there was not another anywhere in the world, and I was certain I heard him say, "Thank you, Mr. Moleskin. God bless you!" which, of course, I then thought to be a strange speech from a scholar and gentleman, even though poor, to a tradesman like my good, homely old father. But, some years after, I found there was all the time a good bit owing for grocery, and the tutor had only come, at his own suggestion, to work it off in trying to teach me mathematics, but my father in the kindness of his heart could not keep back the money of which he knew he stood in great need, and used indeed very often to get him to stay and have his dinner with us. Perhaps I ought not to have told this at all, but I was led into doing so accidentally, and may reasonably be excused, as it does no credit whatever to myself, somewhat the reverse, indeed, as showing how stupid and lazy I must have been even in those days to have profited so little by my good opportunities, but only to my worthy father, whose heart was certainly in the right place, wherever his head may have been. I speak, of course, only of book learning, not bookkeeping, etc., for he was always considered a par-



ticularly shrewd business man even by the trade itself.

But to come back from this wool-gathering to my own humble matrimonial affairs. There was a delicate difficulty in the way of our, that is, Mrs. Masterman's, projected marriage. Usually, and as I think very properly, a marrying couple, if church-folk, go to their own parish church and there undergo the usual ceremony, their marriage being duly solemnized by the vicar, assisted by as many other clergymen, more or less distantly related to them, as they can induce to take part in the function, as references to character for social position and respectability, and if funds are little or no object, full chorally.

And even many genteel dissenters, too, I have noticed, however stanch and bitter they may be as to merely spiritual things, when it comes to a really practical matter, of an important, and even in these latter days highly permanent, nature, like holy wedlock, prefer the services of a regular parson, however benighted and void of true religious life, and the comfortable security of a solid old church, to the ministrations of their own beloved pastor in one of the many tabernacles in the wilderness of dissent, just as one seriously ill discards the nostrums which have served



to amuse his valetudinarian fancy when he was out of sorts, as some folk habitually are, throws all the quacks overboard into deep water, the deeper the better, and calls in the best qualified practitioner he can hear of. Indeed, a retired druggist, a neighbor of mine, tells me he always knew when a customer was really ill by his ceasing to buy patent medicines and sending orthodox prescriptions to be made up.

It is much to be feared, however, that these lapses of better class dissenters into exceptional conformity by going to the church for marriage, frequently cause not only great searchings of heart, but hot burning of heart also, to their own proper shepherd, inasmuch as it commonly happens that just as at law the costs, as a rule, follow the verdict, so when these errant sheep are married in church the fees, so to speak, usually follow the ceremony.

Now Mrs. Masterman did not attend St. Kitt's the Less. She went off with exemplary regularity and punctuality every Sunday morning somewhere, presumably to some church, because I had heard her incidentally mention chapels with a familiarity bordering on contempt. She was, as the reader must have gathered, a lady of well-defined tastes



and judgments; her enemies, whom I admit she wanted not, might go so far as to say of particularly strong prejudices; and her opinions when once formed were practically inconvertible. As she herself used to say, she might conceal them—though I never knew her to do so—but she would not alter them. When the possible union of our two hearts began to loom within easily measurable distance I caught myself guilty one Sunday morning of the meanness of tracing her course to her place of worship and watching her enter it. It was wrong, I own, but I positively did not dare to ask her of her faith. I have never boasted of my courage, physical, moral, Dutch, or other. Had it pleased Providence to call me to the station of a hero I should have been a most cowardly hero at my best; and ever since I had had to do with Mrs. Masterman I had been falling off in my valor. Cunning is the instinctive refuge of the less superior. I dared not, I repeat, put to Mrs. Masterman a question which she might deem shamefully impertinent; for I have noticed that people who profess any religion at all are usually more reserved and touchy about it even than about their property or their wills.

And yet I thought I ought to know,



for I felt that I could not under any pressure whatever, save, perhaps, some painful form of martyrdom, marry a female Jew, Turk, infidel, or heretic, after so regarding such all my life as I had been taught to do by my spiritual pastors and masters, whose instructions concerning my feelings and duty toward all such wicked outcasts I received and obeyed much more readily and thoroughly than those relating to my neighbor. Nay, I could have gone yet further and have added that neither could I wed a Mormonite nor a Hallelujah tambourinist, both of whom would without doubt have been added to the above list if they had but flourished a few centuries sooner. Even in these lax days of free-love and easy divorce we must draw our marriage lines at some point, I suppose.

The results of my playing the spy on Mrs. Masterman's Sunday movements were negative rather than positive; the exterior and interior of the sacred edifice satisfied me that it was neither a synagogue nor a mosque; as clearly, too, it belonged neither to the Roman Catholics nor to any of the generally known sects of non-conformists. Peeping in, I saw one so be-robed that if he were not a regular clergyman he was an undistinguishable imitation of one; and I



caught enough of the service to confirm this conclusion, which the notice board still further confirmed. But it seemed to be the Church of England with a vague difference; I still lacked certainty.

By what looked like good fortune, the next morning, having to wait a few minutes by myself in Mrs. Masterman's sitting room, I observed her prayer book standing in the bookcase, and this promised to throw light on the subject; but here again I was still left in doubt, for it could only by courtesy be regarded as the Book of Common Prayer, being, in fact, merely a sort of expurgated prayer book, with the principal orthodox doctrines strictly left out; just as a school edition of a classic has all the grosser improprieties cut out, so Mrs. Masterman's prayer book seemed to have all the doctrinal improprieties, to call them nothing worse, of the ordinary version as carefully excised, only without asterisks to show where the orthodoxy was omitted. She might therefore be attached to some Church of England, but pretty presumably not to that by law established.

But when the crisis arrived, and our marriage became inevitable and almost imminent, it behooved me to attain to some reasonable certitude in



this matter. If people are to be married at all they must be married somewhere. The time and place obviously lay at the bride's discreet appointment, not mine. I had still a lingering, straw-clutching hope that, church or no church, her clergyman, even if he were genuine, might have some conscientious objection to celebrating a marriage, as a ceremony too orthodox for his approval, or for some equally good reason; in which case we could, after all, be married at St. Kitt's the Less by our good old rector, as seemed most proper.

Nerved by a sense of duty and by inexorable necessity, I one day pretty firmly, almost bluntly, asked my betrothed if she were a proper church-woman.

"I mean, my dear Mrs. Masterman," I added apologetically, "are you a member of the Established Church of England? and where would you like our nuptials to be celebrated? and though it is perhaps inquisitive to ask questions, when? also, by whom?"

"To which section of our sorely distracted and divided Anglican communion does your first inquiry specifically refer, Mr. Moleskin—to the high, low, or broad church? for I will not even mention the, self-styled, Free."



Now all this seemed to me to be a mere controversial quibble, completely evading the real points at issue, namely, the place and time of our marriage; and I could but reply that high, low, and broad church appeared to me so much alike, doctrines and ritual of course apart, these being in each of them left entirely to the clergy, that if only their ancient privilege of rendering due financial support were properly secured to the laity, I was content to shut them all three up under the common name of the Church of England, leaving them, as different sections thereof, to fight out purely doctrinal and ceremonial issues among themselves, in the Court of Arches and elsewhere, as they had always done hitherto.

Mrs. Masterman, being a lady of excellent sense and judgment, was evidently much impressed and pleased with my charitableness, for she at once became comfortably affable, and said, with that curious, inscrutable smile of hers, that I displayed a noble catholicity of spirit; but she must have misunderstood me in that, as I detest all papistical rites whatever, and most of all the pinchbeck imitations of them performed by dishonest professed Protestant bishops and clergymen.

Mrs. Masterman very lucidly ex-



plained to me that she belonged to the higher, purer Church of England of the future, which was at present only in its birth throes. Up to this time, I understood, its constitution was unformed, its tenets somewhat unsettled, and its very self in a state of growth, or at least of change. To my humble faculties, naturally at that moment bemuddled, it seemed to be founded or floating on a sentiment of universal religious liberty, equality, and fraternity, and chiefly the latter, and to be confined to one small congregation. If they had a creed at all, running to any ordinary length, I presume it must have begun, "I do not believe," and gone on to specify most of the objects of popular Christian belief; if it were not negative, but positive, it would necessarily be very brief. But the upshot was that we were to be married at the church I had seen her enter, and that I must see the Rev. Ewman Purecult and make the needful arrangements with him.

This I duly did, and found him a tall, gaunt man, but agreeable, and, I must say, polite to me, as a stranger, and even an alien from the commonwealth of universal brotherhood and sisterhood. I perceived, too, a weird, anxious expression of face most becoming to one upon whom the duty



of promulgating a new version of an old religion rested.

When I informed him of our engagement he said he had expected the announcement for some days; at which I was greatly surprised, as Mrs. Masterman and I had never properly kept company in public, nor even walked out together during our short ante-matrimonial converse; which, indeed, was not quite my idea of true courtship; but my dear lady-elect was so perfectly correct in everything, and she thought it inconsiderate to obtrude the sight of our supreme happiness upon those less fortunate than ourselves, and she added, besides, that such walking out was vulgar, and should be left to the lower classes.

As to our approaching marriage, after mentioning in a solemn approving tone many married couples out of the Old Testament, and some from the New, all of whom I had known from my youth up—though I was glad to conclude from his quoting their examples that he did not use an expurgated Bible, as well as a revised prayer book and hymnal, for otherwise surely some of these characters must have been omitted from his list—he presently became more natural; and smiling, though still very anxiously, said he hoped that in our



future journey through life we should prove very complementary to each other, as husband and wife should do; and I—shamefully, stupidly misunderstanding him—answered that I hoped we should prove comfortable together, whether many compliments passed between us, or, contrariwise, not; but I did not see the good of married folks always flattering each other, particularly before third parties, which only makes them ridiculous; though, of course, I approved both of verbal compliments and little presents being exchanged at Christmas or the New Year, and on the anniversaries of birthdays, wedding days, and similar events. Whereupon he again smiled, but much less seriously, and then laughed outright; which I took to mean that he quite agreed with me, and so inferred that there was a hidden vein of good common sense and kindly nature in him after all, only heavily overlaid with the religion of humanity.

To revert to Mrs. Masterman's discourse on this religion. It was to me unintelligible; I had no clearer comprehension of the religious or the ecclesiastical status of Mr. Ewman Purecult and his followers when she finished than I had before she begun. I had not interposed many interruptive questions either, for I had dis-



covered some time back that it was expedient to let her proceed in her own way. She had, moreover, a habit of free quotation, which rendered it dangerous to interfere with the placid flow of her speech. These interpolations were in no way indicated, but were introduced and dropped without a sign, and were so closely interwoven with the texture of her own remarks that it was often impossible to detect where the one passed into or out of the other, so that I never felt certain whether she were uttering her own admirable sentiments or merely those of some other master mind, of Barrow, South, or Jeremy Taylor. To avow agreement, for in any case I should not have ventured to differ, might have been to convict myself of a presumptuous agreement with Bishop Butler, or possibly Archbishop Tillotson himself, an impertinent folly I could not risk.

That shoemakers have a deeper insight into religion, politics, and most other subjects than any other class of men, except cobblers, goes without dispute; and wishing to have the opinion of a recognized expert on Mr. Purecult's teaching, I accordingly applied to Mr. Watson, an intelligent shoemaker, and an old friend of my father's, there being no cob-



bler readily available. Mr. Watson was a shrewd old man, very pious, and very well off, having, as he himself used to explain, never found true religion any hindrance to worldly prosperity. Being a deacon at a neighboring chapel, my inviting him to come and hear a quasi-heretical sermon, and pass judgment on it, was like asking a sentry to leave his post; nevertheless I prevailed on him to do so, and his verdict was as follows:

“Timothy,” said he, such was the familiarity of our friendship, “his discourse reminded me of the writings of some great art critic when he is saying something exceptionally foolish and false, and instinctively expresses himself with his utmost eloquence, that the weakness of his sense may be carried off by the strength of his words. Now Purecult’s sermon was very beautiful all through, full of poetry, pathos, and fine sentiment, and some of it was good sense, too; but his preaching would not do for me, Timothy. I do not want your beautiful sermons, full of sweetness and light; what I want is to be edified. I have been edified all my life, and now I find I want edifying more than ever.”

I do think our rector, good old Dr. Morton, who had held the living of



St. Kitt's the Less ever since I could remember, was as kind-hearted, worthy a clergyman as ever lived, full of considerate charity for all laymen, and even ministers, both within and without the pale of his own Church, still holding his own tenaciously, but without aggression; an easy-going, genial old English gentleman in holy orders, with a smile and a kind word for everyone, of approval and sympathy, of sincere respect, at least of gentle pity and benevolent hope. I knew how secretly grieved he would be that I was about to desert St. Kitt's, and be married elsewhere, and how openly kind he would be over the matter, making unreasonable excuses for me, and no reproaches. For myself I believe if I had even then been at liberty to forego the blessings of wedded life, and the privilege of being married in a strange church by that eminent disciple and prophet of the altruistic faith Mr. Purecult, in favor of my old life, Dr. Morton and St. Kitt's, I should joyfully have made the sacrifice, but I had no choice in the matter.

The marriage elsewhere than at St. Kitt's was the last straw. It seemed unnatural, ungrateful, inconceivable; for I had always associated any idea of my possible marriage, at some time, to someone, only with St. Kitt's



and its rector. Often during the sermon my thoughts wandered toward the altar, the vestry, the parish register, and I had pictured some her and myself, just united in the bonds, in the midst of the quaint old monuments, and I fancied us surrounded by the spirits of the noble army of married men and women, whose virtues were recorded around, who had been wedded on that very spot, and gone thence to walk honestly and lovingly, hand in hand, together onward, till downward to peaceful graves; or perhaps had come together there for an hour only, to drift further and further apart ever after. I liked and cherished the thought of a common sympathy with all these past generations, including my own father and mother among them, who had been wed at that altar, through many bygone years. And then, in my reverie, we would proceed to the porch, to find at its steps the old women, and some old men too, poor old women waiting to be remembered, looking now with eager desire—I cannot write greedy—for their small dole, and with some faint interest at the new happy pair, and perhaps thinking, who can tell? of another young and happy couple long ago, one of whom little thought then that she, too, would one day stand a poor



old woman at a church door to receive the alms of the newly wed; and before my fancies could run further came the welcome hush preceding the invocation. To give up the urns, mural tablets, ghosts, old women, all that constituted the very essence of a wedding ceremony, its beauty and glory, seemed impossible. Nevertheless it had to be done.

Feeling every inch a culprit, I entered Dr. Morton's study, prepared to make a clean breast of it, and was so cordially greeted that I should have become yet more distressed had there been opportunity, but he prevented me with:

"Come in, Moleskin, my good fellow. Eh! eh! what's all this I hear? So you're going to be married. Well, 'tis time you should, you know, 'honorable in all,' and you have my blessing and best wishes. So you are not coming to St. Kitt's? I am sorry to hear. Well, well, they must have their way, and they will, too; and you are leaving us. Never mind; if I don't see you and Mrs. Moleskin on Sundays I must see the more of you on week days, and perhaps some time you may come back together to St. Kitt's. But mind, we shall send the orders for our Sunday-school treat to you just as before; we know where we are well served, and



fruit, sugar, and spices are too serious things to be trifled with. But who and what is this Mr. Purecult? He holds a sort of church service, I believe, but not quite ours. I ought to know all about him, but I am getting rather indifferent to these matters."

Now this turn in his conversation delighted me, as I shrunk from the matter of my leaving, and wanted nothing better than to learn Dr. Morton's opinion of my new church and its minister. I at once told him all I knew, or could make out, about him, and then asked how he thought I, as a plain and would-be conscientious man, might correctly describe Mr. Purecult if anyone should inquire as to my religious faith.

"Moleskin," he replied, "I am puzzled to say. He appears to be a kind of religious Proteus, and I am not able from your description definitely to classify him, for by the time I had done so he might have assumed a new shape. For the time being, and pending further changes, he would seem to combine the works of a cultured humanitarian with the faith of a pious skeptic."

Before we parted I reassured him of my sorrow at cutting myself off, if only for a time, from all my St. Kitt's church associations, and, with some diffidence, I begged him to allow me



to continue all my trifling subscriptions to our parochial charitable institutions. I feared he might refuse me this favor, but he granted it quite cheerfully, and I took this alacrity for a sign that he forgave my defection.

In due course, therefore, in accordance with Mrs. Masterman's desire, we were married by the Rev. Ewman Purecult without any assistance whatever. The announcement of our wedding, composed by my bride herself, as one of the last acts of her viduage, as she termed her inter-conubial state, ran thus:

On July 20th, 1887, by the Rev. Ewman Purecult, Mr. Timothy Moleskin, of  
Lower High Street, St. Kitt's-the-Less,  
Southwark,  
to Priscilla Masterman (*née* Sauncoore),  
widow of the late Mr. Joseph  
Masterman.

The ceremony itself was as decent and orderly as possible, and quite unceremonious—indeed, I never saw anything of the sort more so—but, I must say, meager and cheerless, leaving a still unsatisfied feeling, a wanting, as it were, to be married over again, more fully and exhilaratingly. It was the bare solemnization of matrimony with funereal decorum: no rice, though I have both given away



and sold pounds of rice, in my time, for weddings; no old shoes, nor even old women, that is, not real old women, only some aged professional beggars of the female sex, mere understudies of old women, so to speak. However, we were actually married, and with as binding validity as though by a bishop in his own cathedral. The sacred edifice itself presented a depressing aspect quite in harmony with the ceremony. Hard and cold, with blank walls and ground-glass windows, with ventilators here and there, it resembled a second-rate chapel in a country town: no quaint ecclesiastical accessories, no dim religious light, no hatchments, no storied urns, no animated busts, no mural tablets—though it was a silly jest of Tomkiss that I went to St. Kitt's to worship the monuments—in short, none of the things I had so long regarded as part and parcel of a church.

After my sad bereavement I now feel at liberty boldly to say that my first marriage ceremony was distinctly uncomfortable, and enough to set any respectable, decently æsthetic husband against the married state at the very outset. Now, whatever else a marriage is, it ought to be comfortable, ought to be made so, if that be possible, above all to a bachelor, who

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most needs comfort on such an occasion. For, consider, the bridegroom is giving up his freedom—and liberty is sweet to all. Even a widower is yielding up a freedom re-acquired only more or less recently; but the bachelor! the bachelor's liberty is what I may call freeborn: he has not been broken in to bondage and draught; and he should be married in all available comfort, and supported by plenty of stained glass and monuments, an assistant clergyman or two, and a goodly number of true but light-hearted friends.

I have said nothing about the bridesmaids: there were none.

Mrs. Masterman would not hear of dear old Margate, so we went to that well-known genteel watering place, Southend, but found it in my humble opinion not to be compared with Margate in shrimps, however it may stand in point of good breeding; though for my own part I think the manners of East End visitors to the seaside, whether short sojourners, week-enders, or only excursion trippers, are equally easy, hearty, and jolly at one of their favorite haunts as at another, still not, of course, so polite as those of our Southwark borough people, though this may be prejudice. I could spare only one clear week, however, so it did not



matter much where we went; and as my beloved wife, as I suppose I may now call her, said, we took our own company and happiness with us, and I said, Yes.

The late Mr., but now Lord, Tennyson, a handsome blue and gold copy of whom Mrs. Moleskin conferred upon me as a wedding present, inscribed, with becoming widowly delicacy, in her own firm hand:

From Priscilla Masterman to Timothy Moleskin: a souvenir of Wednesday, July the 20th, 1887,

and which I can confidently recommend to the perusal of my readers, in one of his agreeable poetical effusions speaks of a rift in some lover's lute, which, not having, I presume, received timely attention, gradually opened wider and wider, until it eventually completely spoiled the lute. Though the lute is not a musical instrument with which I am at all familiar, indeed I cannot make bold to say I ever actually saw one, under that name, I have no doubt the incident really occurred; because I have myself seen a banjo, which I take to be a low form of lute, with a small crack in it, from which proceeded awful melody; and as the voice of the artificial black man who played it was also badly cracked, I conclude



there had some time been a little rift in it as well as in his banjo, both of which having been carelessly neglected, the colored vocalist produced a discordant harmony so distressingly comic that one could but hope these cracks would rapidly widen until they quite silenced all.

This much about the lute and its poor relation the banjo, because a slight rift in our connubial concord unfortunately made its appearance during our very honey week, and I was always thankful, and more so than ever now that death has ended our brief union, that I stopped it quickly and effectually by firmly resolving to give way myself where one of us twain must do so: that is, in things non-essential. In business I must have absolute supremacy; but I perceived that in domestic and most other subordinate matters, if peace was to ensue, I must defer to dear Mrs. Moleskin's opinions. I saw, ever more clearly and fully, that by intellectual prowess and skill she was a woman born to command, a mistress of legions with whom for me at least it was vain to contend. Having a will of her own, she would also have a way of her own, the right of which I could not successfully contest.

Before Mrs. Masterman became



Mrs. Moleskin I knew she was a superior, a very superior, woman; but the tenth part of her superiority was not then known to me; had it been, the law itself, with all its myrmidons, penalties, and other persuasive powers, be the same more or less, had not induced me to marry her, no, not so long as I had had a penny left for costs, nor even for damages; I would—or am I now writing with a merely post-eventual valor begotten of security? For although I am sensible how much wiser and better than I the first Mrs. Moleskin was, I had become so habituated to my own inferior ideas and ways that I could not cease to prefer them to her more lofty ideal and the more excellent way by which she led me. I could nowise get thoroughly to relish this new and higher life, which I am sure sat awkwardly upon me because I felt so uncomfortable in it. This I admit was my own fault, and I have never disguised my unworthiness of so great and rare a matrimonial prize as I unluckily drew.

With such a gifted wife ever at my side, I could at least improve the opportunity by learning all I could from her, and this I set myself to do; and I now reckon that to have lived for two whole years with dear Mrs. Moleskin, in closest intimacy, day



and night, without any vacations to speak of, imbibing instruction continuously from her edifying discourse, interspersed with select extracts from Butler, Barrow, Tillotson, and others too numerous to mention, was equal to six or eight years, deducting the usual holidays, at a high-class finishing boarding school for young ladies, including the best masters, as advertised.

Among other acquirements, for example, I learned the ready use of many of the longest and best sounding words in our language, which I flatter myself the average family grocer usually remains ignorant of to his dying hour; and this I owe solely to my admirable wife, who, being a living encyclopedia in herself, had them all at her accomplished tongue's end. I own I did not at the time always understand her when she spoke polysyllabically, but I used to follow her as well as I could, and then at the earliest suitable opportunity hunt up these hard words and find out their meanings. I understand that one of our great poets adopted a similar plan in his literary pursuits, and prepared himself for his life's work, at its very outset, by careful reading and learning of his dictionary, and ever after wrote poetry of such superfine unintelligibility that only those who, like



himself, have got their dictionaries by heart even pretend to understand him, and they only pretend, but do not really.

The rift in the lute of our matrimonial felicity and unanimity—after this long digression—was indeed a foolish, insignificant thing, merely a horse's head turned right or left, my bride wishing to take one road, and telling the driver to do so, just after I had directed him to take the other. A sorry enough trifle in itself, I thought in my haste, and still more at my later leisure. Still, I did not like being thus openly set aside, and down, in the eyes of this man, who thenceforth, of course, referred all such questions to her decision; and I could not refrain from asking myself, with, I fear, some bitterness of spirit, for she was alive and well then, where was even the semblance of the three things she promised and vowed so lately: to wit, love, honor, and obedience?

Doubtless, however, I ought to have considered that my newly made wife being, as she was, a born ruler of men, who, as Miss Sauncoore, had governed her father's house, and afterward, as a wife, her own household, would naturally be impatient to resume in her new sphere that exercise of conjugal authority which



had, perforce, so long lain in abeyance during the interregnum. I may therefore have been unreasonably susceptible in feeling aggrieved at her instinctive, prompt reassertion of her wonted supremacy.

The first, and now late, Mrs. Mole-skin had no mean secrecy about her, being far above all commonplace vices, but she was endowed with a dignified inscrutability which worthily supplied its place, and this was supplemented by an impenetrable reserve of manner which effectually frustrated any attempt to draw from her by impertinent questioning information which in her discretion she chose to withhold. I had never sought to pry into her affairs during her widowhood, and I had no exact knowledge of her pecuniary position until after our return to Lower High Street, when we found it necessary to discuss such matters, with special reference to her furniture, which I then discovered constituted nearly the whole of her worldly possessions. Her entire fortune came, as the saying runs, in, not with, her, and, though surprised, I was not displeased at this—rather well pleased, indeed, being myself comfortably off, with my hardly earned (by my father) property, besides the business; and, thank God, not being of a mercenary



turn, I now rather hoped that as she contributed nothing to our joint domestic basket and store, this might be taken as some slight set-off to her preponderance in other respects, and perhaps it was, for in calling to mind what the first Mrs. Moleskin, as a wife, actually was, it is but fair to consider also what she might have been.

The deceased Mr. Masterman, my first wife's first husband, was a man of genial, almost jovial, tastes, especially for liquids, of which he was morbidly fond. He had lived in good commercial style, spreading a liberal table, denying himself little or nothing that he could get credit for, and, to speak compendiously, enjoying life all round unwisely well. Only after his lamented demise in the prime of this agreeable life did his bereaved consort discover his true worth, which proved to be less than £2000—say two thousand pounds—most of which, on the final settlement of his complicated affairs after two years' litigation, passed to his creditors and her lawyers, eventually leaving the widow little beyond a small annuity secured to her for her life inalienably, unanticipatably, in short, absolutely, impregnably, by a judiciously foresighted marriage settlement. This, a meager balance of cash from the



estate, and the furniture being all that remained to her, she was just about to engage in some suitable employment of her time and talents in order, as she herself put it, to supplement an income insufficient for her moderate but accustomed requirements by an increment earned by her own abilities and efforts, when her attention was fortunately directed to my humble self, and the unpleasant necessity was averted. Although she was eminently qualified to fill, and even adorn, the post of lady companion, on terms of equality, or that of superior governess, she wisely preferred the male companionship of a husband. But, no doubt, considering that her husband's wife should be above suspicion in motive as in conduct, she made it confidentially known to everybody that she had yielded only, not without a decorous struggle with her widowly feelings, to my irresistibly ardent suit, and consented at some sacrifice on her own part to make me as happy as I deserved to be.

A philosopher might explain, though I cannot, how it is that property seems to increase in relative value in a ratio equivalent to its decrease in volume. When Mrs. Masterman's, now Moleskin's, worldly estate had shrunk practically to her



furniture alone it was amazing—pathos forbids me to say amusing—how the value of this rose in her estimation. Her furniture assumed a sort of representative character, and stood for her stock, her shares, her everything that her former husband had left to herself, for his creditors. I suppose it was because it was now her all, and one's all, whether it be the "bits of sticks" of poor Lazarus, or the costly furniture of a bankrupt Dives—well, one's all is everything to one. However, she was reluctant to part with anything, I just as unwilling to part with my father and mother's old chairs and tables, and the house was but small, so in seemly compromise each gave up some things and retained others. She gave me a free hand in the shop parlor, and she took the same herself in the drawing room, her special department. The house was certainly altered and beautified, but for my part I liked the dingy old home, or the memory of it, better than the new.

My excellent wife, too, had her surprise. It is, or ought to be, difficult to conceal from any wife; from such an one as my first it was impossible. When I disclosed my circumstances to her even her well-disciplined reticence gave way under a sudden impulse of astonishment and



delight, and she said, "Why, my dear Mr. Moleskin, I had no idea you were half so well off as this!" Her discovery bore immediate fruit in the addition of a second servant to our little establishment, to make room for whom two hands had to sleep out, and it continued to produce crop after crop with inexhaustible fertility, as will presently appear, for I will not anticipate evil, nor good.

Mrs. Moleskin was so impressed by the unexpected affluence of our position that she reverted to the subject again and again, seeming never weary of the pleasant topic. I could regard all this only as a proof of her extreme disinterestedness in choosing me for her husband, and cherish a flattering conviction that some humble merits of my own, and not my pecuniary position, had gained for me the esteem and hand of so superior a helpmate, and this was indeed something of which to be happily proud.

At the first blush of discovery Mrs. Moleskin put the case briefly and forcibly thus:

"Well, Mr. Moleskin, I must say I am positively ashamed of you, more so than I could ever have expected to be. You a small tradesman! Why, as far as mere money goes, and it goes a very, very long way indeed



nowadays, you are a perfect gentleman."

"Gently, gently, my dear Mrs. Mast—I mean Moleskin," I ventured to reply, with a deprecatory smile; "gently, mum, please, I am no gentleman, I well know."

"Do not make yourself absurd, Mr. Moleskin, of course you are not. I refer merely to your means, your income. You are content to appear only a groveling grub" (here she indicated a creeping caterpillar-like movement) "when you might be a beautiful butterfly" (here she waved her arms up and down as in airy flight); "that is why I am so ashamed of you; but at least you must now be a chrysalis, Mr. Moleskin."

I could not clearly comprehend her meaning, and could only tell her I did not understand these nice pecuniary distinctions, which I left entirely to her, just as I left bulls and bears to my stockbroker, but I would be a chrysalis if she wished me to, or anything else in reason that would mitigate her shame at my being so comfortably off.

We thus entered on a transmigratory state, and I need tell no reader who knows anything of human nature—and who that possesses one does not?—that from this time forward our domestic arrangements were in a



whirl of ceaseless revolution, reformation, enlargement, and so on. With characterisitic promptitude Mrs. Moleskin had already determined that she would retire from business, feeling that she had realized sufficient to do so with comfort, if not luxury. In the meantime, out of consideration for my strong habits and weak prejudices, she began upsetting 37 Lower High Street as an eagle stirreth up her nest of callow eaglets, and fluttered round me incessantly, to prepare me for, and stimulate me to, my coming flight; so flinging my poor money-bags in my face, telling me I had no business in business, with similar hard sayings, some of them so dark that they were thrown away on my obtuseness, though probably good enough in themselves, and perhaps applicable to the circumstances of their origin, but so far as I and my retail grocery business were concerned having apparently lost whatever point they may ever have possessed, so that they simply moidered me.

Illumined by experience, I now see that I had better have retired on the very day Mrs. Moleskin came, as it were, into her fortune. Yes, even if I had sacrificed my old established business worse than I did. Yes, yes, even if I had given it away—well-



selected stock, valuable good will, aye, and the very lease at a low rent itself. It is painful to feel sleepy when at work, but when night comes sleep is pleasant enough. It is terrible to see death drawing near when we are in the midst of life's work, but death, too, may be heartily welcome when life's day is quite over.

I never thought I should be thankful to give up my business, which had always been as much a pride and a pleasure as a profit to me, and only to end a daily worry. If any reader should happen not to be a retail grocer who has retired, being driven thereto by his good lady, it is no use his trying this, no, not if he reads it twice, or as many as three times, as I myself often read a sentence which I cannot make sense of, through its depth, or otherwise.

But, just imagine, many times every day, and most of all on Sunday, when business stops, and people as a rule take their rest, often traveling from eighty to a hundred miles in order to do so—fancy, I say, hearing the same words, to the same tune, "Now, Mr. Moleskin," perhaps "my dear," but not always, "don't be a grub. I really cannot allow you to be a grub; you are a chrysalis now, you know." And this, as she herself said, always brought me to reason,



and at length to complete retirement from business, as she intended it should.

From the numerous handbooks, and fuller treatises on the subject, by its more eminent professors, I had always concluded that housekeeping and domestic economy in general ranked among the exact sciences; but from practical experience I should now infer that no two married women agree even on its first principles, while they differ by a whole firmament on mere details of practice. I purposely restrict this deduction to married women, because maidens are for the most part so highly accomplished in the art of becoming all things to all men, and such adepts in concealing that art, that no one can tell what they are, nor foretell what they will prove to be. In my poor judgment it is impossible to know what any woman is before she is married, and very difficult to do so after.

I presume Mrs. Moleskin and my mother must have belonged to different schools of gastronomic science and art, for my first wife would have everything in our domestic arrangements otherwise from what it had been in my good mother's time: the exactly opposite way, if such there were, if not quite contrary, then as



different as the nature of the case would permit, so that if people really ever do turn in their graves I imagine my poor, dear mother must have been in a state of perpetual rotation.

And as to the last generation, and all that sort of idle talk, well, fifteen years, or say even twenty, and I am sure that was the outside difference between them, could scarcely be called a generation. My father and mother, like myself, were but ordinary mortals, and very likely made a fair number of mistakes, but, hang it all!—your pardon, my more polite readers!—they must have possessed a genius of perversity of the very highest order to have managed to do everything wrong. Surely they must have stumbled on the right way now and then, if only in error.

Onions, to begin with them: Mrs. Moleskin would have me to know that onions were under the inexorable ban of the upper classes, from wholesale tea-dealers downward; so that I must have a genteel, strong aversion to them at once, as a vulgar esculent, quite impossible to us even while retiring, and yet more so when actually retired. I made this sacrifice with great reluctance; for the taste is strong, bordering on passion, and not easily abandoned in mid life; to the last wandering Israel thought



more of the onion broth of Egypt than the honey and milk of Canaan. I own it would be wrong to eat onions if keeping company, unless the lady had eaten some too, when, of course, they would find their natural affinities, and no offense to either.

However, I give up onions, including their Welsh cousin the leek, which, indeed, few care to eat. Garlic and shalots go without telling, and I am not clear about kippers, the window being opened for a minute or two, not to offend better class customers; but I still do not see tripe, a dish honest and harmless enough, if there ever was one, though but insipid without onions, as cooked in "the past generation."

As to tobacco: In those days I was no smoker, that is, not to say smoker. But keeping tobacco, both loose and in packets, and also cigars, in which latter I did very little, gentlemen seeming to prefer professional tobacco-nists, while I never smoked them myself, familiarity having, I suppose, bred contempt, I was obliged to have a whiff or two after breakfast and dinner, and a meditative pipe or two the last thing in the evening, with suitable trimmings, if only to inspire confidence in my customers, who might otherwise have suspected the quality of my stock.



And though our little kitchen was as snug and clean as the shop parlor itself, it still was the kitchen, and underground, too, and I never could bring myself to think it exactly the proper thing for the so-called master of the house to be sent to the lower regions, though, of course, the servants were not present. Indeed, I often wished they were, as their company would have been more social than silent solitude. So, finding it unendurably dull and lonesome, the very door being shut, to keep the fragrance out of the house, besides having to sit with my head halfway up the chimney, like a smokejack, I soon brought myself down to half rations, one pipe, that is, and one glass, or at most an extra afterthought.

The morning smokelet I could contrive no way, the kitchen being out of the question at that hour. I missed it a good deal at first, but, there now! one gets used to everything. I pleaded pretty hard for even a cigarette, but my good wife said cigars and cigarettes were all one, like husband and wife, male cigar, female cigarette; that the cigarette would grow into a cigar, which seemed contrary to nature and reason, and that she would she could wean me from smoke altogether, thus treat-



ing me like a child. She was, in fact, a sincere, consistent, confirmed anti-tobacconist on principle, which is the most obdurate kind there is, or, I hope, can be. But enough! even now I scarce dare trust myself on smoke.

I do not know that I ever got on quite proper terms with our first second servant. Old Janet had bad times with Mrs. Moleskin, my first wife, but said she should always stay with us, and put up with things, to look after the young master, meaning me, for the sake of the mistress, meaning my late mother, for she recognized only one mistress in the whole realm of domestic service, as she had promised her she would. But even green withes' vows can be broken, and after a time she gave warning and left. I could not blame her. Even a king, with ten thousand, is not able to meet another king that cometh against him with twenty thousand. Janet was no match for her new mistress, though she had ruled her former one, and, being routed, prudently retreated.

Sarah, the parlor maid, whom we had before Euphemia, was our first second servant, and was for a short time companion to Janet. Unlike Mrs. Moleskin's, when Masterman's, former scrubby little maid of all



work, Sarah was a singularly smart girl, tall and handsome. Her manners toward me, whom she appeared to look upon merely as a harmless appendage to her mistress, though always painfully civil, were so decorous as to seem at times almost supercilious. At first I had to put forth some distinct effort even to place myself on terms of equality with her, and more than once a Miss inadvertently slipped out just as if she had been a customer. If I had been free to follow the bent of my own homely inclination I should have addressed Sarah as "My dear," just as I did most young girls who came to my shop, like my father before me, that is, if they were tidy and modest, not, of course, the slatternly and impudent ones; and this, I can honestly say, I always did in pure innocence and out of good feeling; but as Mrs. Moleskin barely approved of my My dearing herself, it was not to be supposed she would allow me to My dear her maid.

Mrs. Moleskin may or may not have been color blind, which is a matter for her own conscience, and I have only to state facts without impeachment or justification of motives, but she insisted on Sarah wearing perpetual complimentary mourning indoors. But on such a question as



this I should not, being only a man, think of obtruding my comparatively worthless opinion, women's dress belonging to those hidden mysteries into which the less the male human intellect presumptuously pries the better; and I am personally so Gallio-like in respect to the fashion and color of female domestic apparel that if the first dear Mrs. Moleskin, like the virtuous, notable wife of Lemuel, whom in many points she much resembled, had resolved to clothe her household in scarlet, I should not have whispered an objection. I might indeed have regarded it as a wild æsthetic freak, though scarcely so absurd as some other æsthetic crazes; but, be sure, I should not have said so.

Fortunately, however, black and white, though to my taste rather somber, and making some young women look like a widow moulting, became Sarah wonderfully well, giving her so genteel an air that from three to seven o'clock on the second Thursday of the month, when my wife entertained a party of her co-religionists to sew for newborn humanity, with Mr. Purecult to make sweetness and light for them, with tea and all sorts of curious cakes, my very best mixed biscuits being by no means good enough for my ladies, I several times



very nearly shook hands with Sarah on the stairs, the fanlight being small and dim, and it was a mere mercy I did not, though I saved myself only just in time, once, by clutching at the handrail, as though I had made a slip. And indeed she was much more respectable-looking than many of the ladies in the drawing room, whom I scandalized Mrs. Moleskin by saying Mum to on their first visit, not knowing that it was an improper word. But the last of them was barely off the doorstep before she called me upstairs to show me the error of my manners. It must have been a most grievous offense, too, which I had innocently committed, for never before had I seen my dear wife, who usually maintained such a philosophic apathy, in a state so nearly resembling a commonplace pet. Now my father said Mum, almost continuously, using the title in nearly every sentence he addressed to the ladies of his acquaintance, particularly customers; and I had always done the same, looking on Mum as a good-natured, friendly term of respect, almost of distant endearment. However, as I found Sir and Mum were so horribly vulgar, I studied their disuse, and after a time only lapsed into a casual Sir or Mum, when too excited with joy or anger



to bethink me of my new manners. On this and many other occasions Mrs. Moleskin showed me my total want of good breeding. But my difficulty was that I had to double the arduous parts of gentleman and tradesman; for if I did not say Mum in the shop I was thought rude, while if I said Mum in the drawing room I was really rude. I contended it was because I was in a false position. Mrs. Moleskin answered it was because I was a chrysalis. Thus, as all roads lead to Rome, everything tended, or was twisted toward, our speedy retirement from trade.

But, to proceed, matters got worse and worse. Just before I was married they had seemed to be at their very best, I had never known them so every way favorable before; but I suppose when things come to their best they do generally begin to mar. The new cook made a reasonable grievance of having to prepare two dinners, one for my hands, who went in in two batches of two each, and the other for my wife and me; for Mrs. Moleskin would not hear of our sitting down to the table with my shopmen. Indeed she was rather, what in a less polite lady I should term, rude, on that subject, and I thought it somewhat inconsiderate of her constantly to call my young men



my paid servants, although she must have observed that I always spoke of them with proper respect as my hands; for I think these little things important as showing true, good middle-class politeness.

Then we had always had an old-fashioned merry Christmas, the hands, and perhaps an old friend or so of my poor father's, dining with my mother and myself, while she was alive, that is, afterward with me alone, on roast beef, turkey, plum pudding, and fitting concomitants, and all as hearty and jolly as could be. But my excellent wife said we must form a higher ideal of Christmas, which was a time of universal good will to all humanity; and as cook stoutly declared she would not dress two Christmas dinners for anyone—which I thought sounded reasonable enough, though I did not venture to say so—and Mrs. Moleskin had determined to have Mr. Purecult and some of her fellow-disciples to our family Christmas dinner—my paid servants must, she feared, for once—as though Christmas came every few weeks—well, must shift for themselves.

When I told my hands the state of affairs, as delicately as I possibly could, and gave them the wherewithal to have a regular good Christmas din-



ner together somewhere else, I felt as much ashamed of myself as I well could do; but when I saw the state they were in that night I was yet more ashamed; and as decent, steady hands as most, in a general way; but what else could I expect when quite unrestrained? But of this more anon.

Mrs. Moleskin said we should keep a blessed, happy Christmas, accordant with our superior enlightenment; and I suppose we did; but it certainly was not a merry one, and, for myself, I was as miserable as I ever hope to be, though we could not have sat down to a better dinner, nor better cooked and served, if we had been the very darkest sinners under the sun, nor could these have done fuller justice to it than we did; and I was delighted to see these good people enjoying themselves and their fare so thoroughly, for I think a touch of the natural man not altogether out of place, even in the most enlightened humanitarians, especially on Christmas Day.

The intellectual and spiritual fare was, I believe, of the same rich and appetizing quality as the material, but I could not at all understand one half of the conversation, and was rather muddled over the other. So far as I could make head or tail of it, everybody ought to be absorbed in



love and good-doing to all human creatures, except themselves and their own nearest relations and dearest friends, and be true brothers and sisters to all but their natural brothers and sisters; but as most of their talking and my hearing came on after we had finished eating, and, partly, drinking, I may have got slightly confused, and misunderstood them. However, as I have invariably noticed that those who do not first take reasonably selfish care of number one generally have nothing but the kindest sympathy and best wishes to give to other needy members of the human family, and that these ungrateful wretches much prefer less precious gifts, something sordid, in fact, such as money, or its equivalent, their meaning, if they have any, is of little interest, save to themselves.

As their impractical nonsense-talk seemed to degenerate into mere platitudes of hyper-philanthropic imbecility as the evening wore on, I presently made an excuse to go and see how my poor hands were enjoying themselves, and, as I have said, I was truly shocked. I did no good either, for on seeing me they would insist on drinking my health, to the yet greater detriment of their own, and I left them roaring out that I was a jolly good fellow, which comes into no



collection of Christmas carols that I am acquainted with, though well enough in its place and way, so long as people are not too far gone to sing it properly together, in chorus, and not each singer beginning and ending separately from the rest, and thus turning it into an ill-timed fugue.

It was some excuse for them that it was Boxing Day; for we had settled to have both our Yuletide dinners then, instead of on the true Christmas Day, which was Sunday, that Mr. Purecult might be of our house party, and that the hands might not feel under any Sabbatic restraint; perhaps a needless precaution, good liquor being no observer of days. However, I mainly blame ourselves for driving the poor fellows into a tavern by our universal benevolence; and as I walked back I could not help sadly thinking that if nature had cut me out for a maudlin philanthropist I was certainly a dreadful misfit. Altogether, I know I was very glad when this blessed, happy, much too merry Christmas Day came to its end.

So time dragged on, and here was I, neither a retail tradesman nor a retired gentleman, with all the cares and troubles of both, and without the pleasures of either; and my heart being no longer thoroughly in my



business, I began to contemplate without reluctance the possibility of soon giving it up entirely, as my wife had resolved we should.

Before spring had well come, that is to say, early in June, she entered on her campaign of exploring various localities, and scoured every suburb of London, from Hampstead to Croydon, from Blackheath to Acton, with rigid impartiality; and toward September she would have me take my little summer holiday at home, that I might accompany her to a few of the likeliest places, why I know not, seeing that she made her own choice at last. To me all this was like traveling in foreign parts, and I saw more of the outskirts of my native metropolis in ten days than I had done in all my previous life.

During this grand tour it was wonderful what sagacious objections Mrs. Moleskin took to every part in turn; she knew where the east winds blew keen, or the fogs lay heavy, or offensive chemicals tainted the air, ay, even where it was a clay soil, though, of course, far below the surface, and to me quite out of sight and mind; and, as I humbly reminded her, a good many people did live, and some of them old folk too, in all these deadly places. And, then, she seemed to be equally well informed as to the



conditions and character of the different resident populations, most of whom appeared to be on some ground or other exceedingly obnoxious as neighbors, though, as I delicately but forcibly put it to her, whatever their disagreeable occupation, nationality, or religion might be, they were our fellow-creatures, and must live somewhere and somehow, and the grocery was crowded enough already, so we ought perhaps to try and tolerate them. "No, Mr. Moleskin," said she, omitting the dear, which she always did when she intended the expression to be final, "no, Mr. Moleskin, decidedly not."

One neighborhood which I thought delightful and quite unexceptionable was, she gave me to understand, the favorite residential suburb of artists, actors, and even actresses, and others. She certainly knew more about social propriety and such matters than I can pretend to, and I did not go much to the theaters myself except with orders; but I have found the few artists I have known pleasant gentlemen enough, and quite up to the ordinary average; while everybody knows what wonderful productions they sometimes exhibit at their Royal Academy and similar places, though of course they show their best pictures at the regular shops, in



darkened rooms, like a peepshow, at a shilling a head, and sixpence for a descriptive catalogue, telling you how much you can get an engraved copy for, if you apply at once, which is rather expensive for one picture when you can see a thousand in an open gallery, and broad daylight, for the same money.

We, that is Mrs. Moleskin, ultimately fixed on Wandsworth Common, chiefly, I think, because it was the last place we went to, precisely as ringworm is always cured by the last remedy tried, just before it dies away of itself. My patience was nearing to an end, and a hope was springing up in my breast that my indefatigable wife would break down in despair in the midst of her own many objections, and so we might settle down quietly again in Lower High Street, where thirty-seven had just been painted in three coats, oak-grained and varnished, to make it look as attractive as possible to any proposing purchaser, as I am sure it did to me, though it grieved me to see it look so nice if I must shortly leave it; and I dare say Mrs. Moleskin too began to fear I might take deeper root again if she did not strike while the iron was hot, and make hay while the sun shone.

For once our inclinations jumped



together, as they will sometimes; for I looked upon Wandsworth as a highly genteel suburb, almost too much so for me, in fact, and Tooting Beck as its most fashionable part; and here we presently fixed ourselves, but not so easily nor so fast as I write, for house-hunting now succeeded to suburb-hunting, and proved quite as tiresome.

We chose Tooting Beck, which from the boards, "House to Let," promised ample variety of suitable residences; but when my wife came to look over the unoccupied houses she complained that one was this, while another was that, and as I could only run over to view the results of her explorations between dinner and tea, when the morning rush was over, and the bustle of the evening had not begun, I need not say I was kept alive and nearly run off my legs. I am not going to give a description of my travels, for no sensible person would read it if I did. Suffice it to say that in October she met with a promising half-built house, which we eventually secured—as the agent put it, as if a mob had been competing with us for it, while really the board had been standing there several months, and only two inquiries had turned up, one of them just at that time, and he by report, for we never



actually saw this strangely coincidental applicant, so keen and resolute that it was a miracle he had not "secured" it instead of Mrs. Moleskin, and no doubt he would have done so had she not artfully persuaded the agent to give us the refusal of it until half-past three, later than which half hour he could not, dared not, go.

It is worthy of note how, even in our more important affairs, very slight considerations often influence, and finally determine our decision. After piling heavy weights on one scale, and then as much on the other, we lay on one or other the few ounces which turn the balance. Mrs. Moleskin well knew this, and also the value of a little delicately flattering attention. She discussed the advantages and drawbacks of the Tooting Beck villa with consummate skill. There was the iron hand of a dexterous, pertinacious advocate within the velvet glove of a suave, frigidly impartial judge. Quite incidentally she said:

"And as you are so undivorcably wedded to your pipe, you know, my dear Mr. Moleskin, the small room at the end of the passage can be made into your own private smoking room. There will be plenty of space left for the garden tools, as well as for hats,



coats, umbrellas, and sticks; and by leaving the door into the garden slightly open, or even the window, all the smoke can pass out, and you need not be smothered unless you wish."

It was very good and forethoughtful of her thus to have regard to my future personal comfort. My fancy took immediate possession of this little prophet's chamber, almost to the exclusion of the rest of the house. I began on the spot and moment to furnish it with an uneasy chair like a large beehive—no, I would have two, if they could be got in; and then I would—"Hallo, my fancy, whither wilt thou go?" said I to myself, pulling up short. But I retreated to this little room as a fair haven, many and many a time in imagination, long before we entered the house.

We were at the agent's prepunctually, inspected, bought. It was a newly built villa, slowly approaching completion, which I looked on as a merciful respite, for necessarily we could not enter it until the following spring, and in the meantime my dear wife could expend her superfluous energy on workmen, paint, paper, and such things.

Has the careless reader ever considered as he read them what serious difficulty there must have been, what ingenuity, arguings, quarrelings, mu-



tual recriminations, in discovering and bestowing some of the names of suburban residences? Every day during my recent tour I had met with names which appeared to me to savor of inspiration, and to be almost beyond the unaided wit of man to have invented. Who gave these names, why, and how they pronounce them are to me still admirable mysteries. Very early in the new year Mrs. Moleskin was good enough to take me into council respecting the christening of the little villa she had bought and I paid for. Somewhat elated, I fear, by her polite considerateness to me, I promptly suggested St. Kitt's.

"No, my dear Mr. Moleskin," said she, "our more genteel friends would think you still hankered after the fleshpots of Egypt."

What she could mean by this enigma I cannot pretend to say. I may have been a grocer, but a butcher, no, certainly not. I tried again, but very modestly.

"How would Roseville do, my dear, or Flora Lodge?"

"Mr. Moleskin," she replied, with perhaps needless asperity, "I wonder at even you. Do remember you are about to become a butterfly."

"Well, my dear, I suppose Lower High Villa would not do, as you wish me to forget Grub Street, as you call



it; and perhaps you had better put a name to it yourself. What would you like, now?"

"Of course, my dear Mr. Moleskin, I wish it to be your name——"

"Not Timothyville!" I interrupted in astonishment.

"Oh, no, nor Moleskin House. I mean only that I should like the name to be your choice."

"It is sure to be so, my dear, if it is yours," I answered.

"Then suppose we say Doves' Eden. When the garden has a few shrubs and flowers planted in it it will be quite a miniature paradise."

"But really, my dear Mrs. Moleskin, granting that you must know much the best, I never remember to have seen a villa called Doves' Eden yet in all our ramblings, and though the precise site of the Garden of Eden is not generally known, and various localities have been claimed as probable, I never heard of Tooting Beck being one of them. Still, if you like Doves' Eden, and feel safe about it, let it be Doves' Eden by all means."

"Then we may consider that question settled," she said, "which will save trouble, as I told the writer to put that name on the oak gateposts this morning, in gold letters, on a royal blue scroll, which will look rustic, and yet courtly."



Our domestic discomfort increased during this interval of reprieve. My exemplary wife regarded it as her duty to her husband and herself to look after the different workmen with a diligence much greater than that of any ordinary clerk of the works, dropping in upon them at the most unexpected hours several times a week. She must have had the railway time-table by heart, and would leave me in the middle of a meal, or a sentence, to catch some particular train, though there would be another in a few minutes, the trains running about four times an hour nearly all day long. Alas! alas! but I must not anticipate.

The way in which she mastered all the intricate details, as she termed them, the little ins and outs, I called them, of every branch of business employed there was amazing, and illustrated more clearly than ever what a vastly superior woman she was. It is true the men threw the blame of everything that went wrong, as most things did, entirely on her, saying, "The Missis, she would have it so"; and one of them—but I admit in an ungovernable rage—went so far as to say a little accident which had befallen him was "all along of her meddlesome interference." However, she plainly proved to me in



every case that she was absolutely right, and they utterly wrong, and that they would have made twice as many blunders if she had not watched them so carefully.

The builder himself, who had stipulated in a printed form that extras were to be extra, was, I must say, always civil enough, and said the mistakes were of no consequence whatever, and should soon be set right; and he even complimented me on having "such a first-rate good lady, who might have been in the trade herself, she was so well up in everything," which I own made me feel proud of her; but pride is an expensive luxury, as I have often found, and did then; for to finish this matter, I may mention here that the extras totted up to a good deal nearer £100 than £25, as originally casually intimated, though he could not, as he said, bind himself to a penny.

But when one of the men said he supposed the lady must have a nice large nursery at her present house I thought he was taking a too impertinent liberty in making fun of our domestic shortcomings, and I spoke out pretty plainly and sharply, "No, my good man, we have no children, not even one single baby." Whereupon he grinned all over, and explained that he was the gardener, and meant



only a horticultural nursery, in allusion, no doubt, to her skill in ordering flowers and shrubs; and I then informed him that we lived in Lower High Street, St. Kitt's the Less—which when Mrs. Moleskin heard she told me was altogether wrong, a sad mistake on my part, though I do think I should know my own address by this time, never having lived anywhere else since I was born, until I was taken to paradise, Tooting Beck; and if I did omit to give the number, thirty-seven, everybody knew my old-established shop—and that to the best of my knowledge there was not a horticultural nursery in the whole street, unless the back yard at the back of our back yard could be called one; which I intended for sarcasm only, and a laughable joke, but it quite stopped his grin.

I do not believe, however, that anybody ever got off with less beer than she did, which ladies can always manage better than men, who must to a certain extent put themselves on a pleasant footing with every honest British workman, and, of course, hail fellow! means ale. Now, although the first Mrs. Moleskin was the last woman, or rather lady, in the world to wear a ridiculous snippet of blue ribbon on her ample chest, still less to distribute teetotal tracts she her-



self did not believe in, nor in any other manner to assume a virtue she had not, still she had a way with her; and somehow or other, when it was seen how strictly moderate she was with the beer, the better bred men ceased to ask her for it, perhaps not deeming the result worth the process, and presently it got to be suspected that she was secretly a conscientiously total abstainer, which indeed she may have been in principle, having, as every real lady should have, an instinctive horror of drunkenness, though not in practice; but always exceedingly temperate.

I never complained of the incessant topsy-turvy upset and worry at our home, but Mrs. Moleskin saw how it affected me, and reminded me that my pupaship would soon end, and we settle down in peace and comfort at Doves' Eden. On turning to the dictionary I was relieved to find that a pupa was only the old chrysalis; from the way she emphasized it I was afraid it was something new.

Very early in the spring I began in earnest to look for a successor in business, in which search I seemed to become a complete commercial Ishmaelite indeed, with everyone's hand against me, though my own hand was truly against no man, for I wanted



only what was just and right, and would have taken something less, which at last I did do. But I found every would-be buyer set on driving the closest possible bargain with me, the agents always abetting them, desiring only to see the negotiation brought to an end, and their commission safe in pocket; while I need not tell the practical reader, especially if married, that my dear wife openly, and even ostentatiously, sided with everybody against me, firstly, as being her husband and therefore, necessarily, usually in the wrong, and secondly, impelled by her morbid anxiety to get rid of the business, apparently at any price, and the sooner the better. Poor soul! poor soul! perhaps already—but this will come soon enough later on.

Her easiness about the price, and impatience to close with almost any unreasonable offer, compelled me to equivocate, prevaricate, and even conceal negotiations from her, in such a way that I verily believe, if the affair had gone on much longer, I should have degenerated into lying, just like Ananias himself. As it was, I merely kept back from her knowledge part of the price I had determined on in my own mind as fair, and stopped far short of actual lies; but I felt myself daily demoralizing.



Only once did I utterly lose my temper, such as it is. An agent suggested to me a price which sounded reasonable, and said he could get it, but he must have my name as part of the consideration. Now I never knew anyone value my name very highly before, though it serves the purpose of a name about as well as any other, christened or sur; and as the immortal—certainly. I refrain from the intended, apt quotation; and I apologize to each of my readers. But, to resume the interrupted history, this demand of my name, together with a sort of engagingly plausible, super-straightforward manner he had, put me sufficiently on the alert to ask him what he meant; when he explained: A Company, Limited. I told him the idea was absurd, the business was too small, could not support it, would not keep one director, let alone several, far less a chairman.

“Oh, Mr. Moleskin,” said he, assuming a cunningly confidential expression, “you leave me alone for that; the capital will be three times the price we pay you, out of which you will receive your full price, cash down, and your qualification in fully paid-up shares. You will join the Board after allotment, and have your fees as a Director, perhaps be Chairman.



And I have some most honorable, respectable names ready to go by—I mean, on the Board.”

“Sir,” I stuttered out in indignant wrath, “my father and his, and I too, sir, have always hitherto had a good name, for grocers; we are not an old family, sir, nor a great family, far from it, but the Moleskins have kept ourselves respectable up to now without robbing poor, simple people, who did not know us; and if I did not care as much for my own reputation as I do, sir, I would not tarnish my worthy father’s, no, nor my old grandfather’s, whom I scarcely remember except sitting close to the fireside, not to mention my good mother, who though not a Moleskin by birth became so at an early age by marriage, for any sum of ill-gained money.”

And then he actually broke loose on me, and tried to put the boot on the other leg, and, using words which it is not lawful for a man to utter, he called me things and names I will not repeat, not wishing to help him in befouling me by giving greater publicity to his profane, vulgar abuse, nor being quite sure whether some law might not have me up for libeling myself. He said—omitting his words of supererogation—he said I evidently did not understand the ethics of modern com-



mercial morality; that men of the highest character for probity, ability, and enterprise became directors whenever they were satisfied that there was money in a projected company, being nobly free from any narrow-minded, middle-class moral cant, “and as for *me!*” — this with an intensity of scorn that neither italics, small capitals, nor even old English can adequately emphasize — “why, as for ME!! for ME!!! why, I would not let a man get an honest living.”

I could only answer him that I would never hinder any man from earning his living by honest industry, idleness being the mother of necessity; but when God has given a man good brains and strong hands he should not go about promoting bubble companies instead.

But happily about that time Mr. Stademan turned up, a slow-thinking sort of man, but one who knew our line of business as well as I did, and was pretty keen too at a bargain, though very deliberate, but on the whole reasonable; and as he could not enter into possession for some weeks, I came to terms with him at once, my dear wife of course jumping at him, in spite of the unavoidable delay.

And now Mrs. Moleskin was indeed at home, being scarcely ever in



the house three or four hours together, and so quite in her element, having plenty of room to furnish about in, among so many more rooms. If she was not at Doves' Eden with a spring tape measure, which she shortly wore into a mere string, measuring every nook and recess, she was at one or other of the great furnishing drapers' taking the dimensions of some piece of furniture, for our old housekeepers were nearly all set aside, as grubby, and not fit for a genteel vill. And the remarkable way in which the articles she took a fancy to, that is, determined to have, fitted into any recess she had in her eye, and she had a good many, clearly tended to confirm the doctrine of a special providence.

Ah! that exemplary lady and wife did truly, as she herself often said, save her husband a world of trouble, practically choosing, fitting, arranging everything, from the sideboard in its alcove to the bracket on the wall, and I had actually nothing to do but pay for all. Absolute truth forbids me to say that I had literally never any choice nor voice in these matters, for Mrs. Moleskin, with the delicate tact characteristic rather of the superior lady than of the mere notable woman, sometimes, when she had fully made up her own judicial



mind, would courteously call in my judgment to confirm her own, and say,

“You know, my dear Mr. Moleskin, as this house and its appointments have so far been entirely of your own choosing, I should like this little matter to be just what you yourself wish.”

A judicious physician, when called into consultation by a general practitioner, it is well known, always, in the interest of the regular medical attendant, declares that the treatment pursued has been admirable, perfect—would no doubt as readily say preterpluperfect if the word were medicinally applicable—and then in his own professional interest suggests, curiously deferentially for a man who drives two horses, often a pair, that, “perhaps? eh? twenty-five minims, instead of twenty? hum?” The lower branch of the profession assents with an alacrity and heartiness which seem to imply that the extra five drops means life or death; and thus everyone is satisfied: the modest M. D. receives his fee, three guineas, or perchance five, in the customary furtive manner, as though the payer were corruptly bribing him, the humbler surgeon has obtained a certificate of high competency, while the sick man, if he gets well again, as he some-



times will, even after a consultation, comforts his heart with the reflection that he has had two exceptionally clever doctors to attend him, who, between them, have saved his valuable life.

But I was not so sagacious as an eminent M. D. One evening, very early in the day, I mean of Mrs. Moleskin's refurnishing, I was called in to advise as to the position of my own special armchair, which was standing on the left-hand side of the fireplace, exactly opposite the door. I, but I hope kindly and considerately, suggested that the other side of the hearth-rug, out of the draught, and with my back toward the window, thus having a good light behind me to read my paper by, might be even better; in all which there was, I make bold to say, nothing pragmatical.

"Now, my dear Mr. Moleskin," said she, with a benevolently pitying smile, "I placed your chair where it now stands after the duest deliberation. You probably have not considered how vitally important it will be for you, coming as you well know you do out of an open shop, to continue to have an abundance of fresh air, habit being second nature. And as to the window, I placed you facing it on purpose. Spending so



many years as you have done in a close shop, dull and dingy, your taste has necessarily become somewhat depraved and morbid by the constant contemplation of canisters. Now I wish you to become an admirer, and if possible a lover, of nature, which you are more likely to do by continually looking through the window, especially when it is open."

I received no fee for this consultation, being only the inferior member of the faculty, or perhaps myself the patient; and the chair retained its appointed place. I therefore came to the unalterable conclusion that it was easier for me to accept my good lady's sentences than to persuade her to reverse or alter them. When futilely too late, as usual, I saw where I had made my mistake, and in the seclusion of my own mind I made a post-eventual ejaculation, alas, unprintably profane, at my own stupidity. Of course I ought to have discreetly acquiesced, and said the chair was exceedingly perfectly placed, and then, but very dubiously and insinuatingly, have added, "But—perhaps? five inches further back?" that is, more in the draught; to which my wife might have assented, but I doubt it. Perhaps, one inch: equally, perhaps not.

The last load was carried from



Lower High Street to Doves' Eden, and this was now our home. I went down to 37 to introduce Mr. Stademan, and say my many good-bys, which I never thought to feel so much as I did, but I shook hands with most of our kind patrons, or their matrons, more as old friends than mere long-standing customers, and the very last night we all had supper together upstairs after shutting up, in which I would put up the last shutter myself; and Mr. Stademan, who faced me, insisted on drinking my health, which they did, with I do not know how many times how many, and then wanted me to make a speech, but I would not because I could not, and I wish many others, neither born nor made orators, would follow my example in this. So, instead of making a speech, I only said that I and my hands had all got on very well for some years now, and I hoped those present would prove equally serviceable to their new master and head, and I reminded them that they had earned good characters for honesty, which I was sure they would keep. And on this, incredible as it may be thought by those who do not know how fearfully dangerous even a very little learning may prove—and the less the more—Stademan got up, and actually said that that brought to his



recollection the beautiful lines of the poet Watts, who told us:

Hands were made for honest labor,  
Not to pilfer nor to steal,

and then went on to add that though, of course, Dr. Watts, being a sort of clergyman, had no hands of his own, like the rest of the clerical profession, who are not, as a rule, employers of labor, what he wrote was very true. This was all said after supper, and on a special occasion too, but I was truly thankful Trotwell was not present to hear it.

But when, at length, I went out from the old house, now no longer mine, I seemed to have my father and mother by my side, and even the dim form of my scarce remembered grandfather, all passing silently forth with me, leaving 37 Lower High Street forever, and I am not ashamed to say I felt very sad indeed, for now at last my former home, house, and shop were all parts of an ever-receding past. The next time I saw the old place it sent quite a little thrill of surprise and regret through me to see

STADEMAN, *late* MOLESKIN

over the shop window.

Whatever forms may have haunted me as I left Lower High Street,



Doves' Eden was too bright and cheerful for ghosts. Only sometimes, in what sentimental English boys and girls call the gloaming, which I am told is barbarous Scotch for glooming or twilight, on a dull, gusty evening, I have fancied—nonsense! Everyone who has a liver can create his own ghosts, and the worse liver the better ghosts, so that no reader who has paid for this booklet, not stolen, or, still worse, borrowed it, will care to hear about mine. It was certainly a pleasant place, when quite finished, a house and garden of delights. I have somewhere read that Mahomet, having looked down long and lovingly upon the far city of Damascus, that "pearl set in emeralds," turned away from the view of it, and retraced his journey, without entering the city, saying, "Man can have but one paradise, and mine is above." Poor Mrs. Moleskin saw the paradise she had been at such pains to create, entered it, and abode there for a brief while, but soon passed away from it.

I always felt that she was infinitely too good for an ordinary husband like me, that I did not, and could not, appreciate so great a treasure as I felt sure it ought to be estimated. Mr. Purecult said she was only a loan, and to be duly repaid. I felt how true that was, for it had been



such a vast loan as to be quite oppressive, and when it was almost suddenly repaid there seemed to be a sense of relief and release to me, instead of its being only a distressing bereavement, as, of course, it really was. But I must not indulge too freely in these luxuriously woeful reflections, and the melancholy consolations so incongruously intermingling with them.

Whether it were her arduous exertions in finding, securing, completing, furnishing, and removing to the new house, and the reaction consequent thereon, or the imperfection of the sanitary arrangements of Doves' Eden, the sewers having been carefully laid down on the most approved scientific principles and plans; or whether our house-warming may have drawn the damp out of the walls faster than the builder foresaw, or, as I incline to believe, that the air of Tooting Beck was too fresh, pure, strong, and health-giving for her after that of Lower High Street, Southwark, I for one should not like to say, and what boots it now? but she began to fade like a leaf in the spring at Doves' Eden, and slowly withered away through the summer, until death happily released me from witnessing the decay of so great strength, intellectual, moral, and to the out-



ward eye, physical also, which had never been more conspicuous than during her last illness to the very end, as will presently appear.

But what use discussing the inevitable? for, as she herself once said, "We must all die," which was most true, and I never forgot it, and when her time came I could only bow with every appearance of resignation to the will of a kind and gracious Providence, and I am sure I did so, if any bereaved husband ever did, and when Euphemia, as I still called her, wheeled my chair to the opposite end of the hearth-rug, where I at first wished it to stand, I put it back into her chosen place, and said, "No, Euphemia, not yet, Euphemia; not until after the obsequies; it would savor somewhat of indecent haste." Well, well, I could not expect to have such another model wife, nay, I did not even hope for another such.

Now, assuredly, I should not think of violating the privacy of a sick room, still less of a death scene, although the waxworks in the cockpit of H. M. S. *Victory*, when moored in the grounds of Chelsea College, certainly proved most pleasing and attractive, Lord Nelson looking cadaverous to the life, and they would have been even more so but for the beams overhead being so realistically



low, and thus evoking many sincere ejaculations, often too profane to profane these pages with. But the first Mrs. Moleskin's tediously prolonged final illness and ultimate decease rather resembled a public ceremony, like that of Mr. Addison, or some royal personage, only without bulletins. She manifested her remarkable superiority to mankind, and even womankind, more strikingly than ever; she was strongest in her weakness, great even in death. She consoled with me on my approaching bereavement, instructed me as to some little business then pending, recommended an undertaker, and fixed the class of funeral and the precise site for our family grave, chose her own mourning stationery—but my feelings compel me to draw the veil.

I must raise that veil, however, for a brief moment. The crisis arrived. We stood round the bed, myself, as chief mourner, the servants, and a professional nurse, who seemed totally devoid of human feeling, never wiping her eyes, nor even blowing her nose—surely a simple thing to do—but not a single sniff escaped that heartless nose; she was, I suppose, so used to dying. It seems but a trivial thing to mention, but my dear wife herself grouped us all. She spoke of the servants' mourning,



which, she said, should not be too lugubrious, and the distribution of her own wardrobe, and then, yes, then, formally handed me the house-keeping keys. This affected me very deeply, for I had never had them in my possession before, and I admit I fairly broke down. She bestowed on me a mild, reproofful, forgiving look; I was then privileged to give her the last kiss; she wished me, in firm accents, a final farewell, and deliberately expired. In short, this unimpeachable woman, the late Mrs. Moleskin, was, alas! no more, and I was consequently a widower, and again single.

Among the many incidents of those last days was one episode so singular that I have reserved it for special record. One day my deceased—as she may now be considered—wife told me, with a slightly mysterious air, that she had a communication to make to me. I was at once sure it related to old Maudler, and so it did, indirectly. I confess I never really liked Mr. Maudler, and if he really liked me he never betrayed his feeling. He was the most thorough-going, universally benevolent professor of humanitarianism I ever knew, in speech, that is, for like most such he had little but world-wide sympathy to give away.



We had a small tiff one day. He was talking, as usual, about ever expansive love of our fellow-men, chiefly those who had the good fortune to be colored, in any tint from yellow to black, and in illustration, as we were walking by the Serpentine—it being Sunday afternoon, and after he had dined with us at Lower High Street—he took up a pebble and threw it into the water, bidding me mark the ever-widening circles, the effect of which, he said—I do not know what he meant—would extend through all space and all time, and so was like true love for humanity as such, meaning, of course, niggers. Not understanding his philosophical nonsense, I was naturally rather annoyed, and I pointed out to him, but quite civilly, that while these circles were spreading themselves out, traveling off on their endless, useless journey, he might just observe that the center was already left as still as glass. He flew into a mighty unphilosophical temper at once, said much, his tongue being too large for his brains, and would no doubt have said a great deal more, anger always gaining heat by blazing out, but in the very midst of it a park keeper came up and asked him what he meant by throwing stones at the water fowl, which was strictly forbidden? I



told the man he was not doing so at all, but he said he saw him with his own eyes, and it was no use our telling any more lies about it.

Then I tried to explain to him as calmly as possible—which seemed only to irritate him the more—that my friend was an eminent philanthropist, and was merely giving me an illustration of universal good will, and love, and kindness. To which he replied that he had better begin with the ducks, then, and not go stoning poor, dumb creatures who never did him any harm, and we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. And the knot of idlers who had gathered round us with one indignant voice said: “That you ought!” Maudler evidently looked upon this *contretemps* as my fault and his misfortune.

Now this old gentleman had called upon poor Mrs. Moleskin three times, and they had been very busy together over something, which she said I should see when it was finished; and this had puzzled me, for I knew she could not be making her will, firstly because she had nothing to leave, and secondly—but surely the first reason renders any following ones impertinent. The reader, like myself, would never guess what they were engaged on: it was her own epitaph.

“Mr. Moleskin,” the dear invalid



began, "have you, as I suggested to you, thought of anything suitable for inscription on my gravestone?"

With some shamefacedness, for it seemed so unnatural to have been epitaphizing the living, though I dare say it is often done, I told her I had done so. "Thy will be done."

"No, Mr. Moleskin, no, I will not have it. I decidedly object to it, as too common and conventional," she said with quite a flash of her old fire.

"Well, then, my dear Mrs. Moleskin," I asked very delicately, so as to allay her agitation, "is there any little thing you would yourself particularly fancy?"

"Dear Mr. Moleskin," she replied very seriously, "I had ever intended that on my tombstone, in addition to my name and the necessary dates, should be graven only the one word *VIXI*, a Latin verb, which I may explain to you signifies 'I have lived.' And, indeed, *VIXI* would very often sum up all that a life has been and done. For myself, I once ambitiously thought—and perhaps, who can tell! if I had only had a husband——"

"Why, my dear," interrupted I, "you have had two husbands. Don't you remember?" for I feared she might be wandering a little.

"Ah!" said she, heaving a short sigh, but speaking quite calmly and



collectedly, "you do not, you cannot, understand me," and then, reverting to the epitaph, she proceeded, "Mr. Maudler is of opinion that VIXI, which I translated for him, would not alone suffice, as, since the recent spread of education, scarcely anyone learns Latin; and, too, it is somewhat deficient in detail, and he has been kind enough to promise that he will himself compile an appropriate epitaph for me, founded on particulars with which I have furnished him. I will not distress you with further reference to it now, when you are very properly overwhelmed with grief, but will only ask you when you receive it from him to have it inscribed very legibly, in bold, black letters, not gilt."

Maudler composed, or rather compiled, this epitaph in a singular manner, not wholly uningenious. Roaming about among the tombs in a large and highly popular cemetery, he culled a phrase from one and a word or two from another, adding some scraps of Mr. Purecult's teaching, and then pieced them together, mosaic-wise, to form an appropriate, if not original, composition.

When I came to see it I was sure it was very long, and I thought that for anyone less incomparable than my deceased wife it might be con-



sidered almost extravagant. For my part I should have been well content to have said, "Thy will be done," as usual.

Three gloomy days, three weary nights, had passed since the impressive closing scene, and the time had come for me to take the farewell look at my dead wife. Standing there alone, with closed door, there came a touch of nature which made us of closer kin than we had hitherto been, for in the great deep sleep of death the firm, almost imperious, expression of her face had faded away, and instead, at length, was rest and ineffable peace. As I gazed, tears filled my eyes; the warp of admiring regard, respect, reverence for her was now for the first time crossed by a woof of tender pity and deep love, and I passionately exclaimed, "Oh, my dear wife! my beloved wife!" And in that unhappy moment I resolved that her tombstone should at least bear the one word she had herself first chosen for her epitaph, *VIXI*.

As I looked at her lying there my thoughts ran back through our short wedded life; and in my chastened judgment I could but think that perhaps her most serious defect was her superiority to human weakness; for our human weaknesses form, after all, the most lovable features of our



nature; and the weaker sex, the most perfect and admirable women especially, endear themselves to our rougher sex by their amiable little foibles rather than by their heroic virtues and shining faculties, which draw forth admiration, not affection.

The curious in epitaphs may wish to read Mr. Maudler's compilation, which I therefore reproduce:

In  
Deeply Respectful Memory  
Of

PRISCILLA MOLESKIN,  
Wife of Mr. Timothy Moleskin,  
Widow of Mr. Joseph Masterman,  
Daughter of Mr. Frederick Sauncoore.

Richly Endowed

with nearly all the Higher Virtues, and many of the Polite Accomplishments of her Sex and Station, she freely used her ample stores of intellectual and moral wisdom for the instruction and guidance of all around her.

Her Faith  
was judiciously eclectic ;

Her Love,  
nobly universal ;

Her Religion,  
true Sisterhood with the whole Brotherhood of Humanity.

Denied the mysterious joys of maternity, this eminently Superior Woman devoted herself, conjugally, to two (successive) Husbands, one of whom she buried ; the other buried her, and survives to deplore an irreparable Loss, which must render him evermore inconsolable.

She died on August 9th, 1889.

“ Go thou and do likewise.”



By the advice of the experienced marble mason I omitted the last line, which he thought might be open to misconstruction, and substituted for it her own VIXI, which, alas, proved even more so, as shall presently be told.

Mr. Maudler's literary work—in which I also detected the scholarly touch of the late Mrs. Moleskin, as well as the atheology of Mr. Purecult—was, as I have already said, not quite to my taste, if I have any; but, for all that, I felt—not being a publisher—that he ought to be paid for it: every laborer, even an author, however poor, and perchance needy, being worthy of his hire. Now I am—for of course no one, except, perhaps, an editor, can know everything—I am, I say again, no authority on the value, nor even market price, of epitaphs, though I knew they did not come under the penny a line scale. So, being well aware how sensitive and irritable literary gentlefolks commonly are, especially the unsuccessful ones, among whom I could not but class Maudler, I determined to ask him what he usually got for such things, and I did so; but he baffled me by saying, He would leave it to my honor, just like a cabman; only not meaning, I think, the title honor, but the sentiment of the same name.



I therefore made up my mind to offer him five guineas, and to call it a honorarium, as sounding genteel and quasi-professional, and also to do this with extreme delicacy, not to shock his authorial susceptibilities; and I was glad to see that he was not in the least offended; or, if he were sensible of any outrage to his feelings, he effectually concealed it.

He appeared much more vexed when I asked him for a receipt. Being a business man myself, I had drawn up a memorandum on an old billhead, altering Lower High Street into Doves' Eden, "To one Epitaph on my late lamented wife, Priscilla Moleskin, etc., etc., 5*l.* 5*s.*"; but he said he never gave a receipt for making epitaphs, and between gentlemen it was uncouth; so I humbly apologized, and withdrew the offending document. Maudler further begged me not to mention the payment, nor above all the price, to any of our friends, particularly Mr. Purecult; but his own death, alas! has since released me from this obligation.

Perhaps this part of "My Two Wives" cannot end more appropriately than with the brief obituary notice which appeared in the paper on the day of my wife's funeral, and I have a melancholy pleasure in re-



producing it here. In it also the hand of my now departed friend, Mr. Maudler, will at once be recognized.

On August 9th, 1889, at Doves' Eden, Tooting Beck, Priscilla Moleskin (*née* Sauncoore), the beloved wife of Mr. Timothy Moleskin, who mourns her with disconsolate, lasting grief.








## PART II.

### MY SECOND WIFE, BY HER FIRST HUSBAND.

N the 4th September, 1890, at St. Kitt's the Less, by Rev. Thomas Wilkins Morton, D. D., Vicar, assisted by Rev. E. W. Goodwell, M. A., Curate, Mr. Timothy Moleskin, of Doves' Eden, Tooting Beck, to Matilda, third daughter of John Edwin Sartory, Esq., of The Lilacs, South Putney."

Not to keep any sympathetic readers in a suspense which might be disagreeable to them, I have above plunged boldly into my second matrimonial emprise: somewhat preliminarily, I fear, blurting out the happy result before describing the delightful process which led to it; pushing aside my first meeting with the charming, amiable Miss Matilda Sartory, my very courtship with my sweet, coy, though not too coy, Matilda, my proposal to, and acceptance by, my



dear, loving Tilly, and rushing at once, as I have so often done since that blissful September day, into the arms of my ever and ever dearer wife, my darling Titty, the printer only knows how many pages sooner than I ought to have done.

But I could not keep so much and so great happiness to my selfish self. I could by no means refrain from hastening the announcement of the auspicious event by at least twenty, and I don't care if it prove fifty, pages, that at least some of my softer-hearted readers may share my joy without delay. My only excuse is that I am still a bridegroom, and our honeymoon is still new, hardly beyond its first quarter yet, it seems; though, as I look up, the lawn is bright and fragrant with June roses. But I have only to close my eyes, and the roses become starry orange blossoms, and the scent of the roses is blended with, almost overpowered by, the clinging fragrance of last autumn's neroli. To both of us this Midsummer's Day comes as the longest, happiest day of our honeymoon life—for we have but one life, now—a life so full of serene, loving happiness that it seems impossible it should ever be heightened. Yet our full hearts do find room for a hopeful expectation that before the first anni-



versary of our wedding day, less than three months hence—— But I must not go on anticipating.

Had I, as a more practiced writer would no doubt have done, kept back the marriage a few months and pages, nay, as I myself should have done but for a certain delicious elation and confusion of spirits, which overcome me, and carry me away captive whenever I think of my bridal little wife, I should have told in their proper places many trifling details bearing on my matrimonial relations, past and future, or perhaps I should now say present, as I have already announced our wedding, all of them leading up more or less naturally to my introduction, attentions, and eventual marriage to Miss Matilda Sartory, now my beloved second Mrs. Moleskin.

If I have put any reader to a moment's inconvenience by my precipitancy and inversion of order I feel sure he will forgive me if he ever comes to Doves' Eden, and even ladies, too.

But I must make one yet deeper and heartier apology—to Mrs. Moleskin herself. My calling her Titty, even in a mere aberration of memory, was utterly inexcusable, and I must, therefore, beg her to excuse it. The truth is that between Christmas, 1889,



and the following October our nomenclature in addressing each other passed through four distinct stages, and each stage marking increasing affectionate familiarity, free, I trust, from any diminution of respect. Chronologically it ran somewhat thus:

December, 1889, to March, 1890—Miss Matilda. . . Mr. Moleskin.

Certain trivial incidents and minor endearments occurred during the above period, which it is not expedient fully to particularize. They might by prudish persons be considered confidential, and I am not disposed to pry into anyone's secrets, most certainly not my own. To resume:

March, 1890—Matilda (Miss-less), Timothy (always in full).

April 1 to September 4—Tilly—Tim.

October (date uncertain) thenceforth—Titty—Titty.

For, some time in October, 1890, Miss Matilda (Sartory) and Mr. Moleskin having previously suffered degeneration into their Tilly and Tim, one day my affectionate second, we having just come in from buying her a new bonnet, of the kind called heavenly, gave me a hearty, smacking—well, salutation, and said:



“How very good you are to me, my own darling Titty!”

“Sweetest,” said I, returning the smack between that word and, “What a fond little diminutive! As a pet name, yes, by all means; but is it a perfectly legitimate formative?” remembering, what had perhaps best been forgotten, how fastidiously critical my dear first had been as to even the commonest formatives.

“Oh, never mind accuracy, I must really call you Titty sometimes, because I love you so much, and it sounds so nice and homely,” and another osculation.

“Well,” I replied, “we are, of course, no slaves to correctness; but then if Tim—Titty, why not also Tilly—Titty?” returning it tenfold.

So we agreed that whenever stress of excessive fondness, or a new bonnet, or so forth, rendered it unavoidable, either of us might lapse into the use of this sub-degenerate diminutive to the other. But as Titty was a word apparently unknown to Dr. Johnson, or any other respectable lexicographer, outside the family circle, we agreed, further, never to use it in public, nor even before the parlor maid, which, indeed, was the same thing, and more also; but to confine it strictly to our private intercourse. I am sorry and annoyed,



therefore, to have so soon and conspicuously broken our regulation; but dear Titty—I mean the present, that is to say, the later, Mrs. Moleskin quite sees it and forgives me accordingly.

And now, having given some vent to my wedding raptures, and regained my ordinary common-sense calmness, I must proceed quietly to record in due sequence some events of those last two years which I have so lightly flown over and ignored.

For four months after the death of my truly exemplary first wife I was a widower indeed, in mind, body, and estate. For I seemed also to be now doubly bereft of my business, the loss of which I had always felt pretty keenly, often saying in my heart to some suburban grocer, whose little shop I might pass, “Ah, you lucky dog! there you are as busy and happy as the day is long.” But, of course, while poor dear Mrs. (Priscilla) Moleskin lived I did not miss the cares and anxieties of business so painfully as I did afterward.

She used to tell me that, as I had really no resources in myself, I ought to read some useful, instructive book, and improve my mind; and she selected four highly suitable ones to begin with—a sort of intellectual pem-



mican. Into these I dipped haphazard as they chanced to come to hand, but invariably about the middle, because they opened so readily there, and lay more easily on my lap, and did not drop off so soon if I happened to do so, as I always did, and so got many a good hour's sleep, which helped on to bedtime. It was worthy of Solomon himself, the putative father of so many ancient, wise sayings, to declare that much study is a weariness to the flesh; and I am sure I found it so, and I dare say the preacher too spoke from similar personal experience.

Then, as she said, I must have exercise, so I turned to horticulture, of which I knew no more than I did of astrology. However, long practice at 37, with parcels, made me quite an adept at tying up plants, and I could also do some other such trifling matters; but it all came to little or nothing, as the gardener must do this, because it was so delicate and important, and that, because it was so laborious and unbecoming; and so I was shortly driven to mere walking about alone, mile after mile, mentally wrapping up pretended parcels of grocery for imaginary customers, people after my own heart, who never complained of quality or price, nor disputed their change, and to whom



I was always as civil as possible, asking after their relatives to the third generation, and wishing them good-morning or evening with due politeness. But this mental playing at keeping shop was a poor make-believe all the while, and nothing like real business for pleasure, while the profits, too, existed only in fancy.

After her sad demise, however, I missed the old shop and trade far, far more; and my snug, cozy old home too, and my hearty, friendly hands; how much I cannot express in my rough way of speech. She had made our new house in some good degree a new home; but now it was indeed quite unhomelike. I will not befool myself by speaking of the former Mrs. Moleskin as a bosom wife, a loving helpmate, but she was a companion, a wise friend, a perhaps too ready counselor, and I was now utterly solitary, alone in a dull, silent loneliness. And so passed four months, the deep darkness lifting slowly day by day, the dim, gray dawn becoming brighter and brighter, until at length a ray of light gleamed forth, the day began to break, the shadows faded away, and soon the rising sun restored light, warmth, and joyful life.

The grave, a vault, lay near a wall, on which mural tablets could be



placed, and on it, just above the vault, I arranged to have my late wife's fixed, as it could thus be erected without delay. It was a relief to me to be doing even this, in memory of her. When I took the epitaph the mason, as I have mentioned, advised me to omit the last line, and I instructed him to substitute VIXI, which he did, but in the most grotesquely illegible, ornamental characters even of a cemeterial stone-cutter; and thereupon my troubles began.

When I first understood the meaning of the word I rather liked it; and the more I thought over it the more appropriate it appeared, granting, that is, the propriety of an *ante-mortem* selection of an epitaph. What more can the young child, of a few weeks' life, say than this VIXI? How many a man who has eaten, drunk, slept steadily on through his perfunctory three score and ten years, could find few more truthful, distinctive epitaphs than a bare VIXI! Indeed, VIXI! VIXI! VIXI! might well round off the records of multitudes who have shared only the common lot, and lived but the common life. Some might say their VIXI! thankfully enough, with grateful remembrance of an existence pleasant in its very self. Other some, with a



sense of joyful relief that the long disease, poverty, toil, what not, is at last ended, might as truly, thankfully, willingly, sigh forth their VIXI! Here a pathetic VIXI of young promise snapped short; there an exultant, triumphant VIXI of a statesman blindly, proudly guilty of his country's blood. If I were but a philosophic moralist, I think—I should know when to stop. What has a retired grocer to do with such high themes as these, perhaps even of a poetic nature and dignity?

If I had known as much about VIXI as I do now assuredly I should never have inscribed it on the tombstone of a woman whom I regarded with such exceptional respect as I entertained for my admirable late wife. In a peculiarly unhappy moment I determined on paying her the sad compliment of carrying out her own first epitaphic intention; but why did it not occur to me to give her own translation of it, which I have no doubt was as accurate and spirited as possible? When in Westminster Abbey itself I had sometimes thought how much better a living language was than a dead one, even on a tombstone, and how much more instructive to most of the visitors.

I pass by, not without genial con-



tempt, some unseemly jests at my trying to pass myself off as possessing Latin scholarship, which I detest, as out of place on solemn subjects such as epitaphs. But my readers being all of them singularly intelligent persons, how shall I ask them to believe, even with the most conventional dead faith known to professional theologians, nay, even to make polite pretense of believing, that this simple, innocent VIXI, selected too, as it was, by so admittedly superior a woman as the departed herself, became the subject of the vilest misconceptions which ever added poignancy to the woe of a widower, or caused a highly respectable grocer—I refer, of course, to Mr. Stademan, late Moleskin—the loss of a customer whose orders were large and money good?

The grievance was first calligraphic. The marble mason — sculptor, he vainly called himself—said, as there was plenty of room, the epitaph should be properly displayed, whatever that may mean: a printer's technical term, I understand; and he certainly did his task in a manner worthy of a writing master working with only one pen, as the best of them seem always to have done. Such curves, twists, flourishes, thin up-strokes, solid down-strokes, such capital capitals, such variety of styles



of letter, in fine, such a display of confusion, clearness, and illegibility, as would have done credit to any sculptor or writing master living, all the letters of the alphabet seeming to have got themselves up in a wild masquerade, so that most of them might have done duty for any others, the context alone establishing their personal identity.

Naturally the VIXI came in as the crowning feat, and I must confess it was disguised with marvelous ingenuity, and reminded me of some pieces of music I have heard in which a simple air is all but lost in a labyrinth of variations. I recognized the word at once, because I knew what was to come there.

One kind-hearted but short-sighted old lady took it for a true-lovers' knot, and said she thought it did great credit to my feelings. By most it was at first read as VIXEN, as though the authorities would allow the cemetery to be desecrated by such insulting *post-mortem* spite! while many of those who carefully traced out the very letters themselves still felt suspicious that there was at least a covert insinuation of something vixenish, although, to do her the barest justice, the dear late Mrs. Moleskin had nothing about her of the vixen, except in this unlucky epitaph.



By degrees the misunderstanding got cleared up a little, many who had been instructed as to the real meaning kindly explaining it to their worst informed friends and thereby gaining for themselves credit for superior intelligence, and even a suspicion in a few cases of their knowing some small Latin themselves. There were, however, those who could never be persuaded that *VIXI* meant nothing ill, and in at least one instance it led to what I still think, and in private even call, gross injustice, which I much regret, inasmuch as Mrs. Two-good, the lady to whom I allude, was of our old parish, and was identified in my mind, not only with tea, in which she was the choicest and most particular customer I had, going regularly to three-and-six—our celebrated St. Kitt's blend—and rising to four when she had a few kindred spirits to tea, as she very often had, and paying anything in reason for the best fruit and spices at Christmas, but identified with St. Kitt's as well, where she was a regular Nursing Sisters, Dorcas, Twelve Indigent Sick Widows, Maternity, Homeless Orphan Servant Girls, and other Societies' member, and I cannot tell what good she did not do, but it could not be helped, so we made the best of it.



We did make an effort. I sent word to her by a friend, an elderly widow lady who had been most attentive to me after the demise, defending me through thick and thin with an ingenuity and vigor surprising to my very self, that it was not a Vixen at all, to which, I am informed, Mrs. Twogood replied only by a sniff expressive of hearty disbelief, but presently added, in a deeply oracular tone, that she supposed seeing was believing. Whereupon my friend explained that the word was merely VIXI, meaning in English "I have lived," and conveying no disrespectful allusion whatever. To which Mrs. Twogood replied that she was glad I was ashamed of such imputations on the departed, and, whatever it meant, it ought never to have been put on the poor dear woman's very grave, after she was dead and buried, by her bereft husband.

A week later poor Stademan came over to Doves' Eden in the slack of the afternoon, in great trouble, because Mrs. Twogood had deliberately ceased to deal with him, all on account of this stupid mistake. By my advice, and with some aid from myself too, he penned her a touchingly respectful remonstrance, with a request that she would reconsider her determination, embodying in it also



many sentiments proper to the existing crisis, and some reflections worthy of any family grocer, living or dead.

This he took back with him and duly delivered next morning with his own hand, and a message that he would wait her answer. In less than five minutes the housemaid came tripping down and said—and I for one could not have believed it of any but the worst kind of heathen—“Please, sir, missis have looked through your letter, and says she is a reading her morning portion and cannot have her mind disturbed with accounts, and as you bought the good will along of the business you must take the consequences.” For myself, though, I could not see that any errors committed by me some time after I had left the business could justly be included in the good will; but then I am no lawyer nor divine.

All this, I now thankfully perceive, only served to divert me, or perhaps I should rather say my thoughts, and prevented me from brooding over my recent bereavement as much as I might otherwise have done, just as I have seen some, even middle-aged, widows so interested in their necessary mourning, and comforted thereby, and so anxious that its texture and fashion should be truly



worthy of the dear deceased, and their own broken hearts, as to become quite eager, and almost cheerful, even before the funeral, and not merely resigned, but comparatively happy, immediately after. Such is life, so paradoxical: crêpe cheers, afflictions prove blessings in disguise, and becoming mourning becomingly worn may serve alike to speed the departed husband and to welcome the coming next.

I am sure, too, I did well not to fall in with the suggestion of the marble mason, a man of professionally sympathetic manners and the *sotto voce* speech of an undertaker receiving an order, who proposed to cut out the obnoxious enigmatic word altogether, and neatly insert a tablet, with a cherub with an appropriate trumpet, and of course the usual flourishes thereon, all at a strictly moderate cost. Alternatively, he said, he could substitute R. I. P.; but I told him I preferred to let the matter rest in peace, for if R. I. P. were regarded as Latin I had had enough of that misleading language; and if as English it also might be misinterpreted by some captious people. So it ended; and I am sure every fair-minded person, except Mrs. Twogood, by this time considers me guilty only of innocent



ignorance, not willful, malicious intent.

Mr. Sartory was a friend of my father on my mother's side, having known her family before they were married. He was well connected, having relatives members of the learned and liberal professions, and he was himself well bred and well educated, and an honorable man; but he was a tailor. Now I for one am not ashamed to boast that he followed the conventionally slighted, but potentially lucrative, calling of a tailor, although I have heard so many brainless witlings—they would chatter freely enough before a mere retail grocer, and I dare say spoke just as foolishly about grocers behind my back—repeat stale, senseless joke-lets concerning tailors, even as at those oft-times most blessed among women, old maids, and mothers-in-law, of which women, having the love of Mrs. Sartory before my eyes, I would speak with honest discrimination, as I have, within my own narrow experience, found them, like many other persons and things, to resemble the figs of the tearful prophet, Jeremiah, some samples good, very good, some but naughty figs, evil, very evil, and wholly inedible, even in puddings; but the bulk mere ordinary human nature,



that is, indifferent, just, in fact, like figs themselves, which I know by experience very surprisingly.

But whence this depreciatory ridicule of tailors? Most of the young gentlemen I have had the pain to come across, inane enough for the most part, were far more indebted to their tailors for any little ephemeral appearance they make in the world than to their tutors, of whom, nevertheless, they speak with some sort of mitigated respect; while few acknowledged leading men of fashion really know how much they owe to their tailors. No such conventional disrespect and prejudice exists against milliners and dressmakers, many ladies of high degree being willing enough to enroll themselves and their titles in their ranks, and become tailoresses, which I take to mean female tailors.

Our friendship with Mr. Sartory was not of a business character, he being a very high-class West End tailor; and my father, who rather looked up to him, as a man who incidentally associated much with the upper classes, whose manners indeed he had insensibly acquired, and unconsciously reproduced, with some slight exaggeration—my father used pleasantly to observe that Sartory's cut was a cut above his simple re-



quirements. But, even if he had desired to invest himself with such sartorial respectability as can be conferred by a fashionable tailor, it would have been more than our friend's business was worth to have made but a vest for a tradesman before he had retired from business, and dangerous even then. So particular was he that he would not work for a new customer, however eligible he might personally be, without a formal introduction from an old one, and once amazed and offended a world-known American person who offered, what he facetiously termed their mutual friend, a hundred-pound Bank of England note, as his sponsor, by flatly refusing the money, and insisting on his rule. He used to say that it would have ruined his connection, for a man who went about saying Ha—ow?—which he drawled out to the life to meet audiences—to have had one of his coats on his back. And as to advertising himself, or his artistic productions, he would have died on a scaffold rather than have done so.

At home, which was South Putney, there could not have been a simpler-minded, pleasanter man than Sartory, though perhaps a trifle too obsequious and deferential in his



address and conversation, but this quite wore off after he gave up business, and he became, after a time, independent in tone, not to say rather brusque, it being so difficult to check a reaction just at the right stage.

Several times during the autumn following the death of my first wife we had met in our walks over Putney Heath or Wimbledon Common, and although I had not been to The Lilacs three times in my life, I found him a true friend, and the most sensible, practical condoler I ever met with, without any pretense or affectation; and in this he was widely different from that indelicately sentimental old Maudler, who talked of my poor wife in the most offensively affecting way, as though he were the real widower, and I only a nominal one, often harrowing up his own feelings so vehemently that it was almost beyond my power to console him. Now no man cares to be drenched with condolence, even if it be genuine, which Maudler's was not.

Pray let no superficial worldling hereupon conclude, still less insinuate, that my late admirable wife and I were really antipathetic, or not fully sympathetic, so that I could readily forget her, which I am confident I never shall. The exact opposite was the case. She was not a woman to be



easily forgotten. She had, as it were, so poured forth, and I imbibed, her superior individuality, day by day, that she had impressed even her outward personality on my commonplace lineaments; and catching an unconscious glance of myself in the glass one morning, I was startled at the counterfeit presentment of her well-remembered features and expression. The mysterious resemblance faded away indeed as I applied the lather, but was very striking for the moment, and reminded me of her most painfully. I recollected, with a justifiable access of credulity, a tale I had heard, of an aged widower, who, having no picture of his departed wife, artfully made himself up, with one of her late caps, shawls, and expressions, and so sat for her posthumous portrait, which turned out fully as good a likeness as most photographs do, and deceived all but their most intimate friends, and a few exceptionally wary professional critics.

It was barely the middle of November, when, walking across the Common, Sartory would have me promise to eat my Christmas dinner at The Lilacs. He was so sincere and hearty in his invitation that I could not refuse; and from that 25th of December, 1889, my matrimonial



second, or present, era, the Matilda era, may be said to date.

I had stipulated for my very early return home, but I was so much there within five minutes that I stayed on all through the happy, ever memorable evening. Perhaps from contrast with the dreary solitude of my own house, this proved to me a truly merry Christmas, and a happy New Year when it came, and I hope for many of them.

There were indeed only a few relatives and old friends of Mr. and Mrs. Sartory, for the most part elderly; for he always gave Christmas Day to the outgoing generation, and New Year's Day to the oncoming. Sartory welcomed the turkey, which, singular to say, was, as usual, the finest any of us had ever seen, with his usual pleasantry about his having left his goose at the shop; and everyone, having been duly pressed to do so, told his old tale, paid his old compliment, sang his old song, or cracked his old joke, to new applause, or laughter, as spontaneous and cheerful as they had been years before. Now, for my own part, I rather like a new joke, when it is fairly amusing, as they occasionally will be, and I gladly give them such attentive, prolonged consideration as is sometimes necessary to their appreciation;



but there are worthy persons whose perception of wit and humor is dense, who look only on the serious side of a joke, who are perhaps rather hard of hearing, and who, instead of laughing with the rest, only ask them what they are laughing at: persons, in short, who are not jocular themselves, and but slightly and quite unintentionally the cause of jocularities in others.

And such were many of Sartory's good old guests, to whom, in truth, Christmas came but once a year; who would look back on this evening, its good cheer, and homely hilarity with the pleasure of memory for six months, and forward to the coming Christmas, with the pleasure of hope, for the ensuing half year. Poor, simple folks, it would have been cruel to have fobbed them off with new songs and jests, and Sartory was not the man so to disappoint them: he would as soon have offered them stale fish as fresh jokes, or South African, at once, instead of his old port.

They wanted sound, substantial jokes, with a well-established reputation, such as no one need be ashamed or afraid to laugh at, jokes recognized by connoisseurs and experts in such matters as true mirth-movers, jokes which had stood the test of time, and



came down to them accredited by the laughter of their own fathers and mothers, and even, if possible, by the traditional chuckles and guffaws of their fathers and grandfathers before them; that was the sort of joke for them, not your new-fangled quips and cranks, jests and smart repartees. Give them these time-honored old staggers, and they felt safe in welcoming them year after year with fresh Christmas enjoyment.

In fact, we were right down wisely merry, and without wishing on any account to provoke an endless, barren controversy with teetotalers, I must go so far as to say that, after all, there does really appear to be something very exhilarating in honest wine, not, for peace's sake, to add spirits.

I confess, too, I joined heartily in all the festivities, and enjoyed myself shamefully, for even during the evening itself twingeful thoughts of my late mentor obtruded themselves on me, unbidden and uncherished. I felt I was much too happy, and, indeed, I did make one or two sincere but heartless efforts to pull myself morally together, by recalling some of her more apposite and impressive original sayings, or quotations, whichever they may have been; but even these didactic bits of Masterman, Bar-



row, Moleskin, Fuller, or whose not, failed to damp my cheerfulness for more than a few seconds, and it was only in my homeward hansom at five minutes past Christmas Day that my better nature became disagreeably troublesome, roundly upbraiding me for resigning myself to such unwonted happiness, and suggesting as I sought solace in smoke, What would Mrs. Twogood say? 'Twas no use mentally, nor even vocally, d——g Mrs. Twogood either. I tried it, but she would not be d——d, and reappeared with thaumatropic frequency and persistence, so I kept silence, even from bad words.

Afterward, while lying awake in the darkness and stillness of the night, my so-called inward monitor, stimulated, no doubt, by an extra cigar, became yet more morbidly active, causing me to reflect, with some awe, how Mrs. Moleskin would have reprobated such wretched jollity at any time and place, and above all what she would have thought, and said, too, of my manifesting such indecent resignation within six months of the sad event. Most of which remorseful reflections I came next morning to regard merely as the impertinent reproaches of an over-educated spoiled conscience.

Indeed, I have often been surprised at the extreme difference, and in



many instances absolute contrariety, between my night conscience and my day conscience; the former, especially when under the depressing influence of too much or too strong tobacco, being unduly sensitive, timid, scrupulous, self-accusative, and generally condemnatory, while the same conscience, if indeed it can be the same, the following noon is callous, brave, reckless, self-excusative, and even stoutly exculpatory, not deigning to listen to a word in depreciation of its fortunate possessor. Take, for example, the case of Mrs. Twogood. When I put to myself the question, What, pray, is Mrs. Twogood to you? my craven nocturnal conscience replies, very solemnly, Everything, while my bold, broad daylight conscience answers quite flippantly, Nothing whatever, hang her!

I sometimes wonder, too, whether liver and conscience are synonymous terms, and the two really identical, so that one might speak indifferently of the organ or the faculty, and correctly say, My conscience is a little out of order this morning, I cannot stand these public dinners as I used to do.

Of all the phases of human life and experience, courtship is perhaps the most stupidly uninteresting, tiresome,



and every way undesirable one to write and read about in cold blood. Whether it be the company-keeping of Jack and Polly, walking with each other, and into each other's eyes amorously staring, or the more or less decorous drawing-room love-making of Mr. John and Miss Mary, or the fond settlement-settling by family solicitors, in the higher upper classes, on behalf of Lord John and the Honorable Mary, in all alike it is but a weariness to the unsympathetic flesh of those not concerned therein. Lovers are best left alone, and their sayings and doings unrecorded. If any reader, therefore, deliberately skips the very little I have to say about my own courtship, he, or even she, will not forfeit one iota of my respect or favor. I refer to my addresses paid to Miss Matilda Sartory, for in the case of the previous attentions preliminary to wedlock, it will be borne in mind my voice was passive rather than active.

Love at first sight? Candidly, no. My personal experiences of fervent, life-long love have been so few, not to say unique, that I am perhaps scarcely an authority on the subject, but no doubt in the matter of amatory billing and cooing, as in commercial bills and notes, with which I have been more familiar, there is a



variety, adapted to the diverse circumstances of different lovers and loved, and a young person of either sex may be drawn, so to say, as lovable at sight, or three days after, or at two, four, or even six months after date, and accepted accordingly.

Now Mr. Sartory's Matilda, now happily my own Tilly, instead, was perhaps, being so modestly reserved, not lovable at sight, though certainly at three short days at longest. She was, and is, the very nicest, dearest young woman alive, but equally unobtrusive, and really too amiable to strike anyone who did not know her. At twenty-eight she was still unmarried, a sad case indeed, as most brides of nineteen will admit, when they learn that she had lost her young sailor lover seven years before. Although she was not exactly a widow, therefore, she was next state to one, and better, ah, how much better than many who bear the full, unblushing honors of post-nuptial viduage thick upon them, to be nipped as soon as cruel fate will permit, by the oft untimely enough killing frost of a second or sixth marriage.

That very Christmas evening I for the first time kissed my second, that is, my present and future, wife, then Miss Matilda Sartory. Oh, the in-



expressible, ever-to-be-remembered rapture of a first, very first true-love kiss, of which I felt nothing whatever. In justice to the deceased Mrs. Moleskin, and my bereaved self, I do emphatically assure the very few whom it may concern, and the countless more whom it does not, that I kissed Matilda under the mistletoe, in open gaslight, not only without a qualm, or a blush—and if anyone turned in any grave I was happily unconscious of such gyrations—but without any serious emotion, beyond a slightly pleasurable sense of doing the right thing in the right place. The fact was, kissing was the order of the evening at Sartory's Christmas Day parties, practically everybody kissed everybody quite promiscuously. Even the no longer young and lovely women all expected to be well kissed, and the less young and beautiful they were the more eagerly they expected and inexorably exacted this tribute, and valued it.

I did not see my, now, darling again till next year, that is, last year, when I called to take Mrs., yes, Mrs., Sartory a New Year's Day cake, and wish her etc., etc.; and then Matilda revealed herself to my admiring perception in some of the sweetness and beauty of her character, as a devoted



daughter. Now the present daughter, whatever she may be, is the future wife and mother.

When I saw her simple, unaffected goodness of heart I wondered how on but that day week she had seemed only one of many, almost unnoticed by me, while now she appeared to be an one alone. I stayed long, left reluctantly, found her dancing across my road home, sitting opposite me at dinner, later on actually pouring out the tea, which symptoms no tyro can misinterpret. The next day I was again at the now bloomless Lilacs; I had forgotten something I particularly wished to mention, but I could not remember what it was. Mrs. Sartory, good soul, drew her bow at a mighty skillful venture when she hoped I had not lost anything at The Lilacs yesterday? though of course I could not at that very early stage of the proceedings mention my heart, and before maiden Matilda, too; but on consideration I discovered that such was really the case. After that I went there regularly to look for it, with most fortunate ill success, for each time I lost it again and again, more and more.

Before the end of January I proposed to Mr. Sartory himself to go for a walk on Wimbledon Common. If you have a secret to tell, as an old



farmer told my father, keyholes have ears, do not trust yourself inside any room; go into the middle of a large field, and there speak without fear of eavesdroppers; Wimbledon Common made a fair enough field. "Moleskin," said he, "I shall be pleased to do so." That, thought I, remains to be seen; and, indeed, I felt no little anxious, for already I had begun to look on the success of my suit as a matter of life and deathless happiness to me.

I felt sure Sartory suspected something, for he fumbled about with his gloves, brushed his hat three several times and then put on another one, looked at his own face in the glass, which was so unlike him, that is, his usual self, asked nervously whether it was likely to rain, and then repeated his old aphoristic jest, "You see, Moleskin, an umbrella makes a very good walking stick, but a walking stick makes a very poor umbrella," but wholly without the jocular spirit he generally threw into it. Seeing this, and clutching at the straw "pleased to do so," I felt so greatly emboldened that I believe I could, if it had been necessary, have proposed to him for Mrs. Sartory herself.

We drew into the open; on every side was short grass, not a bush to beat about for spy or listener. The



critical now or never had come; there was nothing for it but a dash.

“Mr. Sartory,” I stammered forth, “before I go any farther—oh, yes, to the butts, certainly, if you like—but I mean with your daughter, not yourself, I think it only honorable, as between gentlemen retired from businesses, before we go any further in this, that is, that direction, to ask have you any objection to my paying my addresses to her—I mean your daughter Matilda, whom I regard as an angel?”

“No, sir,” he replied, with an ominous frown, and looking the embodiment of a veto; “no, no, no, sir. How could you ask such a question? No objection whatever. You have my delighted consent; go in and win her, with my blessing and something down at once, the same as her sisters had. Why, Moleskin, my boy, how frightened you did look; you should have known me better. Why, Ma and I saw it four days ago. Bless your heart, don’t we remember, eh?” By which he no doubt meant to intimate that he and Mrs. Sartory had followed our example long before, as have others too numerous to mention.

My attentions being now approved by the dear girl’s father and mother, I felt justified in making them rather



more assiduous than they had hitherto been. And, to compress three months into as many words, in April I could no longer forbear to bring my hopes to the crisis. Oh, what a delicate, serious thing it is for any living man to propose to any beloved woman. And if it be a trying ordeal to offer heart and hand to a sweet, shy maiden like dear Tilly, what must it be to make some such an offer to one of those bouncing, episcene young persons who dress and talk as though it did not matter of what sex a woman was? I really wonder how any quiet, modest man finds courage to do it; and yet more how effeminate, namby-pamby youths screw themselves up to propose to these virgins that be their fellows.

Just to think of a young, or perhaps middle-aged, man's very world and all that it inherits being puffed into dark, distant space by a breath from a girl's lips, happily often only for a brief space, however; and of another more favored youth wafted up to the seventh heaven of bliss by a similar gentle expiration. Why, a kiss is nothing to this omnipotent, faint whisper. Two letters, woe unutterable; three letters, joy inexpressible; though, I own, kisses will do much to convey assent with a certain sweet, inarticulate eloquence. Would



Tilly say no? No. Would she say yes? Yes. I well foreknew the answer to my proposal before I made it.

Were I more stolid and commonplace than I am I should here state, needlessly enough, that I am by no means romantic, impulsive, mercurial; and that even in the most acute phases of my love-making, marrying, mourning, and so forth, I retain a certain humdrum common sense, which preserves me from those paroxysmal excesses of feeling which are so frequent and affecting in fiction, whose pages they so much adorn, but are comparatively rare in real life, whose routine they would greatly disfigure. I own I went to The Lilacs on that June day of mid April with the deliberate intention of formally proposing to my by that time fondly beloved Tilly, and while full of deep, intense feeling within, I was outwardly calm. I walked all the way there, lightly buoyed up indeed by faith, hope, and love, but still haunted by the deep, secret conviction that my very all was virtually at stake.

There was no ice to break; it had thawed weeks back in the warm sunshine of Tilly's bright eyes and pleasant smiles, and good, kind words; but such a suffusion of humility overcame me, such a sincere sense of my



unworthiness to possess the untold treasure of so pure and true, so trustful and loving a heart, that I almost shrunk from asking it, and could only falter out my proposal in by no means the set form I have been rehearsing over and over again during my long walk to The Lilacs. Then I must needs turn devil's advocate against my very self, disparaging myself freely; telling her, what sure was sufficiently obvious already, that I was not so young as she might wish her husband to be, and, to my sorrow, a widower, that I was no scholar, not overgenteel, in short, that I was only a plain, unassuming man, but loved her dearly, though I was so unworthy of such a paragon as I then went on to paint her.

Whereupon she stopped me, and began to follow in the same, but now ridiculous, strain about her adorable self.

"She too was not a mere girl, and was no beauty——"

"My darling, you are truly lovely——"

"And had passed through a bitter sorrow, and——"

"My sweet, tender pet, I know all about poor Edward. It has added a touching charm to your amiable disposition; and I am sure we have his consent and approving smile."



"But I fear I am not clever, and wise, and accomplished enough to fill the place of the late Mrs. Mole——"

"Don't let us speak of her, dearest Tilly; it is no use; it can do no good now. I know I shall never have another Mrs. Moleskin—no, I mean another wife like her again; I really do not wish to, I don't indeed. But I am sure we may take her consent for granted, too. What was I saying? Oh, I remember. Let us forget all pains—all—everything, and bury the dead past, and live for each other. I do not deserve to call you mine; but if you love me enough to say yes you will make me infinitely happy, and I will do my poor best to make you happy too."

My gentle-hearted darling was not the woman to keep anyone in miserable suspense. If she had intended to reject my suit I should never have given her the opportunity to do so; she would have taken care of that. The decorous barrier of well-becoming maidenly reserve, behind which she thought it fitting modestly to intrench herself, soon gave way, the hypocritical little objections were all hushed, she looked up a love-lit consent, gave a slight, irresistible little pout, and murmured a still, soft



yes, sealing it with a kiss as sweet and fond as ever sweetheart gave her true-love, and I was alone with my supreme happiness.

Perhaps it is almost indelicate to have described all this, for even we middle-class people have our feelings, such as they are. But my dear Tilly says she sees nothing to be ashamed of, or sorry for, and it was the beginning of so great felicity she will not have it omitted, now I have written it; which truly means that she thinks it delights me to recall and record it, as it does.

In the breakfast room I found my, now our, Tilly's father and mother, and throwing my arms around Mrs. Sartory, I gave her a round dozen, just to keep my lips in.

"Eh! eh!" said Mr. Sartory, "what are you grappling the old lady like that for? Why, you'll choke her, you will, you rogue. Well, well, take her," no doubt meaning his daughter, though equivocal, "and, Moleskin, if she does not make you a good wife she is not her mother, nor herself either; only, you try to find her a good husband."

"Sir, please God, I will; that I will."

If free lovers are bad, and to be left quite alone, engaged ones are worse, wholly intolerable, fit only to



be ignored, and as far as our imperfect memories will permit, forgotten past remembrance. Let us, rather, haste to the wedding, recorded so far back. Tilly, as I then called her, usually with the qualification dearest, or some other adjective expressive of affection, or admiration, in the superlative degree, was one of those unheroic, effeminate women who regard marriage, christenings, and similar ceremonies as the most important woman's rites, and therefore to be duly honored in their observance. St. Kitt's the Less was her own obstinate choice, from which nothing could move her. She had never seen it until I took her there one day in July, and showed her the monuments, and quite casually happened to mention some of my bygone fancies about the old place, which she forthwith insisted on turning into realities; and actually told us she should not feel legally married if the ceremony took place anywhere else, even at St. George's, Hanover Square, or Westminster Abbey; and Sartory said it was her undoubted bridal privilege to choose her own church.

So the dream of my boyhood and youth came true in my—may I say early?—middle age, and I was married in the old St. Kitt's Church, amid the quaint monuments and the



crowd of ghostly witnesses, by the old vicar and his new curate.

I hope no one, however stoical or cynical, will be so cruel as to laugh at my gentle darling for what I am going to relate, however foolish they may think her; it was unsophisticated goodness of heart alone which inspired her.

"Mr. Moleskin," she began, which betokened an unfathomable abyss of seriousness, "will you grant me a favor?"

"No, madam," I answered with much asperity; "ask your Timothy."

"Timothy, dearest," this with quite childlike earnestness, "I think the poor old folks must have been sadly disappointed at not getting their money on the church steps at the time when you were—when you were not married there. And though you did make it up to them, it would not seem the same to them, coming privately, would it? Could not we give them double, just this once? And, Tim—yes, sir, Tim, if you *would* let me give one-half, out of my very own pocket money—there, now perhaps you will keep your lips to their proper use, sir, for five minutes." For I had kissed a ready yes. But somehow, fearing she might not have clearly understood my unanimous agreement with her proposition,



I again signified the same in the usual manner.

And in due course she positively handed me her share of the dole, which I could not make her cry by refusing; and I gave twice over to each one, explaining over and over again why I did so; and what with this, and her little hand resting so lightly on my arm that I feared every moment it would slip off, and I should lose my fairy bride forever, and both my own hands at work, and getting down the flight of steps, and, altogether, I was glad enough to reach the carriage, and drive off to The Lilacs.

Our wedding breakfast was, I am told, the same as similar festivals, and a perfect success; but I have no recollection of any one thing in particular. I have it on the same authority as the above that the funny man was awfully funny, which I can well believe, and that I laughed heartily at his jokes. I cannot deny laughing, though I do not remember his jokes, nor even laughing, but if I did so it was more likely to have been at himself. That the bridesmaids were charmingly lovely I am prepared to admit, because most bridesmaids are, and besides, I saw these before the joyful day, and I have seen them often since. I am



incredibly informed, too, that I made a speech. If I really did so, which is extremely improbable, as I never made a speech in my life, my mind is a perfect blank on the subject, as it most likely was at the time.

The honeymoon was too sweet and too short, all honey and no month, as men reckon months; too short, too, to be expanded into one single sentence of reasonable length. And, also, we wish to keep these halcyon days to ourselves alone, a fond memory sacred to silence, which we can enjoy together, but whose tender confidences shall be shared with none. Besides, my present business lies with wives, not brides, with blossoms, not buds; and a wife means home, not vehicles and hotels.

Rather, therefore, will I return straight home to the house of bondage, as I again found it to be, but now truly a delightful bondage. Indeed, there would seem to be compensations and ameliorations even in bondage. Not to instance the inveterately unreasonable and thankless children of Israel, who seemed never weary of throwing the creature comforts of their miserable Egyptian servitude in the teeth of their great liberator, I am sure I have read, or maybe only heard, of prisoners enamored of the Bastille itself, and



desiring to re-enter its homelike cells; while first-class misdemeanants nowadays often appear to relish and regret the quiet comforts of prison life, and on their release take grateful leave of their jailer hosts as though with a conventional "Thank you so much for a very pleasant durance."

My tyrannical Tilly will let me do nothing that I wish, if it is at all tasklike or disagreeable, and I scarcely dare open my mouth in my so-called own house now. Take the tobacco grievance, for example. The first Mrs. Moleskin, it may be remembered, kindly, distinctly appropriated the little room leading into the back garden—a sort of ganglion of the passage—to me as a smoking room, by way of inducement to herself to secure Doves' Eden for my pleasure and benefit. And now, under the gentle, beneficent rule of the second Mrs. Moleskin, I felt that this little room would suffice me: I had been trained in a subterranean kitchen, you see.

"Timothy"—that is the acme of her severity now—"not in a tool-house."

"Well, then, anteroom in summer, but now, and the next six months, breakfast room?"

"Timothy, whose house is this, pray? is it not yours?"



“No, pet love, it is yours.”

“O Tim! Tim! But if it is mine, then I insist—insist, sir, on your smoking in any room you like, except per—haps the drawing room. You only want to make your dreadful pipe an excuse to get away from my society, and have your smoking apartment: gentlemen only, and so forth. But you shall smoke in comfort, sir, where I can sit by your side.”

Willy-nilly, of course I had to submit, as I always have; and often of a winter's evening, when I have sat with my feet on the dining-room fender, with my pipe just charged, thinking, with the abominable luxurious laziness born of a woman, a too indulgent wife, whether the delicious fume that shall be is worth the post-prandial exertion of rising to my feet and reaching forward, two good arms' length, for a match, have I seen a light quietly descend over my shoulder and rest upon the waiting weed; and leaning my head back, have beheld there a smiling face, sweeter than any Three, or threescore, Castles, or male cigar, or female cigarette.

Slippers! I actually had to kick them off, with a start, once or twice, they were so hot.

I dare not, I repeat, even speak;



Aladdin's lamp pales before the wonder-working, magic power of my good genius. If I happen, as I still inadvertently sometimes do, to mention any article of food, it appears on the table in what seems no time. At half-past ten one night I but casually associated occasional sardines with some future breakfast, when, as if by enchantment, there stood a tin of them before me the very next morning at nine o'clock. Anyone who has tried to catch sardines at Tooting Beck in the early morning will understand me. If I had mentioned fresh mangoes I feel sure they would have been there just the same.

The above straws will serve to show which way the soft breeze now blew. I could give countless illustrations of my darling's real goodness of heart, of her constant solicitude for everyone but herself; these are not picked samples: the bulk was better than they. My dear Tilly was simply dutiful; and in man or woman what is there, can there be, better and finer than this, to be dutiful? She was this, a dutiful wife, mistress, friend, so making a perfectly happy husband, contented servants, devoted friends.

Even Euphemia, who took the place of Sarah when we removed to Doves' Eden, soon took kindly to her



new mistress, and grew to like her better and better. And yet Effie, as we now called her, was a girl of much spirit; witness the scene we had when the first Mrs. Moleskin told her she considered her having her letters addressed Miss Euphemia Sprott to be a highly reprehensible breach of social propriety, and she promptly answered that the upper circle of domestics always did so, and she, as parlor maid, looked upon herself as quite as good as the cook, and was not going to be put upon as if she was a second housemaid or kitchenmaid, and as she considered it her proper perquisite, if missis objected would she please take warning and suit herself that day month, and she would look out for another situation. My former wife was for once defeated, and I may say routed, but beat as dignified a retreat as remained possible, telling her a few days after that on my account she would concede the privilege, though I had not intervened in this delicate point of domestic etiquette, except secretly, by giving Euphemia half a sovereign to take back her notice and be a good girl. Now Tilly views the matter altogether differently, saying it is a cheap and harmless pleasure to Effie, and for herself she rather likes the style, it looks so truly genteel to have a Miss Euphemia Sprott in our



service, instead of a mere Euphemia, or perhaps simple Effie, which we always call her now.

So, in most things the second Mrs. Moleskin differed essentially from the first, whose vast superiority to most of her sex I nevertheless cannot deny. Yet I must confess I liked darling Tilly's kindly, friendly ways far more. I am only a plain, homely man myself, and I suppose it requires a very superior husband properly to appreciate a very superior wife.

I did my best, far from good, to repay some of Tilly's constant kindness. I gave up some little things for her dear sake, but necessarily without her knowledge. Trifles are often all that is possible in such everyday married life as falls to the common lot. We may wait long and in vain for the call to do some great thing for the occasion, to immolate a bullock on the altar of domestic sacrifice, but turtledoves and young pigeons may be offered on most days; and so, with her great goodness, and my paltry returns for it, life glided on as happily as life could, and there is little more left to tell.

My old hand, now Rev. Roger Trotwell, duly came to tea as promised, and even stayed to supper, as it rained like a Bank Holiday all evening, and we were much interested in,



and even amused by, the account he gave of his exchanging grocery for his new calling. At first he was inclined to be stiff and dignified, with a sort of quasi-episcopal rigidity, but I thawed him up a good deal with a dock glass of old sherry, which, however, he would drink only for his stomach's sake, and that as though the clerical stomach were a semi-detached organ, in which its nominal owner had personally only the slightest interest. My amiable wife, too, soon made him feel quite at home, as she has the happiest knack of doing, even with shy children. She says, if you wish to make people really happy and eloquent you have only to get them to talk about themselves.

Well, at and after supper Trotwell took us quite behind the scenes. He told us how, feeling he had a soul above grocery, which, unfortunately, I well knew before, and some aptitude for public speaking, of which, also to my sorrow and loss, I was not unaware, he had turned his thoughts to preaching, and so successfully that he would speedily have had a call to a pastorate but for the fact that he was mainly self-taught, and had never studied at a recognized dissenting college; a fatal objection in the eyes of most modern congregations, even the more ignorant hearers nowadays



having a prejudice in favor of an educated ministry. Fortunately, however, he shortly met with a church to whose members this was a great recommendation, one brother expressing his firm persuasion that going to a university, or even a non-conformist college, did so take the brains out of a young man; to which another brother added, and the piety too; while all unanimously agreed in holding that human learning was a carnal weapon, and therefore quite unsuitable to the kind of spiritual warfare they waged.

The junior deacon alone, who had been something in pigs in America, and had retired to his native town to enjoy the fortune he had there acquired, though of the same opinion on this point, seemed indeed inclined to disturb the general harmony of the meeting by saying nothing; but eventually was induced to break his ominous silence, and express his humble doubt whether this otherwise acceptable and excellent young man was duly qualified to assume the pastoral office, he being, he understood, not married, while he read in his Bible that a bishop, which he supposed meant a minister, "must be the husband of one wife," and not like a Romish or Anglican priest. But brother Chawkins, the senior



deacon, who had three daughters still unmarried, explained that this did not mean that a pastor must have one wife, but that he must not have more than one at once, and so was not, as brother Grimes seemed to think, a prophetic slap at the popish and ritualistic heresy of the celibacy of the clergy, but rather at the Mormons, who married all the wives they could.

Trotwell said he regarded it as a singularly special providence that this good brother was so strongly in his favor as he had been, inasmuch as he was about to become the old gentleman's son-in-law. "I saw from the first," continued my shrewd former hand, "that to win the senior deacon, who practically had the living in his gift, I must woo his daughter, and I had accordingly done so, and she has now become my wife, Mrs. Moleskin, and a mother in our little Israel."

Despite any educational deficiencies, Mr. Trotwell would seem to have been fairly successful in his new sphere, as he further told us how the cause had flourished so vigorously under his ministrations that they had been induced to build a large new chapel in place of their former small one, the naming of which had caused endless discord. Some wished to retain the old Zoar, inappropriate



as it now was to the finer and larger edifice, others were set upon Zion, while a third party proposed Zion late Zoar, as a business-like, peace-making compromise; but at length they decided to drop both Zion and Zoar, and even chapel itself, as unworthy of their advanced fortunes, and to call it St. Paul's Congregational Church, a name sounding at once genteel and ecclesiastical, whereupon a small fractious minority broke away, and started a new corrugated iron Zoar, less even than the original one.

We really spent a very pleasant evening, and when Trotwell left, after supper, and after I had given him a trifle toward the liquidation of the chapel debt which still rested on St. Paul's Church, he did me the honor and gratification to say he looked upon me as the embodied apotheosis of commercial success. I did not exactly know what he meant, nor did dear Titty, but from his manner it was evidently something unusually complimentary, and thinking it might perhaps be a scriptural allusion, his studies lying so much that way of late, I tried to trace it out in my Cruden, but could find no such word as apotheosis anywhere in his Concordance, though I searched it through, proper names and all, and



even the Apocrypha. But quite recently I have found the word in a very modern dictionary, and am still more perplexed to understand why he should regard me as an embodied apotheosis, whatever it may mean.

And now why do I sit in my dining room idle and alone, when I have finished my tale, all but a sentence or two? I dip my pen in the ink, to add a very few last words; but I lay it down again and again and the ink dries in the nib. Now and then I catch myself heaving a troubled sigh, as I listen eagerly to quiet footsteps overhead, and the gentle opening and shutting of our bedroom door, and from time to time I wipe my eyes as a tear oozes out, and trickles down my cheek, and I say softly to myself, "Titty, dear, darling Titty."

The nurse came yesterday, and it seems many very long and sad hours since the doctor drove up in hot haste. Musing, I say again to myself, "Dearest Titty, how very happy we have been."

I keep re-lighting my friendly old pipe, over and over again, as it still dies out, and lies cold in my listless fingers. And now there is a hush, as silent as of death itself, and a



feeling creeps over me that my most terrible forebodings are realized, that poor Titty is indeed dead, and I am truly desolate. The door opens, and I scarce dare listen to the message I wait to hear as nurse says: "As fine a little boy, sir, as I ever see, sir, or Mrs. Sartory; and doctor desires me to say, Mrs. Moleskin and the infant are both doing as well as we could be expected, sir, as well as possible."

"Here, nurse, here is five shillings for you—no, half-a-sovereign, and do take the very greatest care of dear Titty—I mean of Mrs. Moleskin, and I will come up as soon as ever I may."

And then, as she shuts me in again, I am not ashamed to say I fairly cried for relief and joy as I said, "Thank God! Thank God for this!"

THE END.

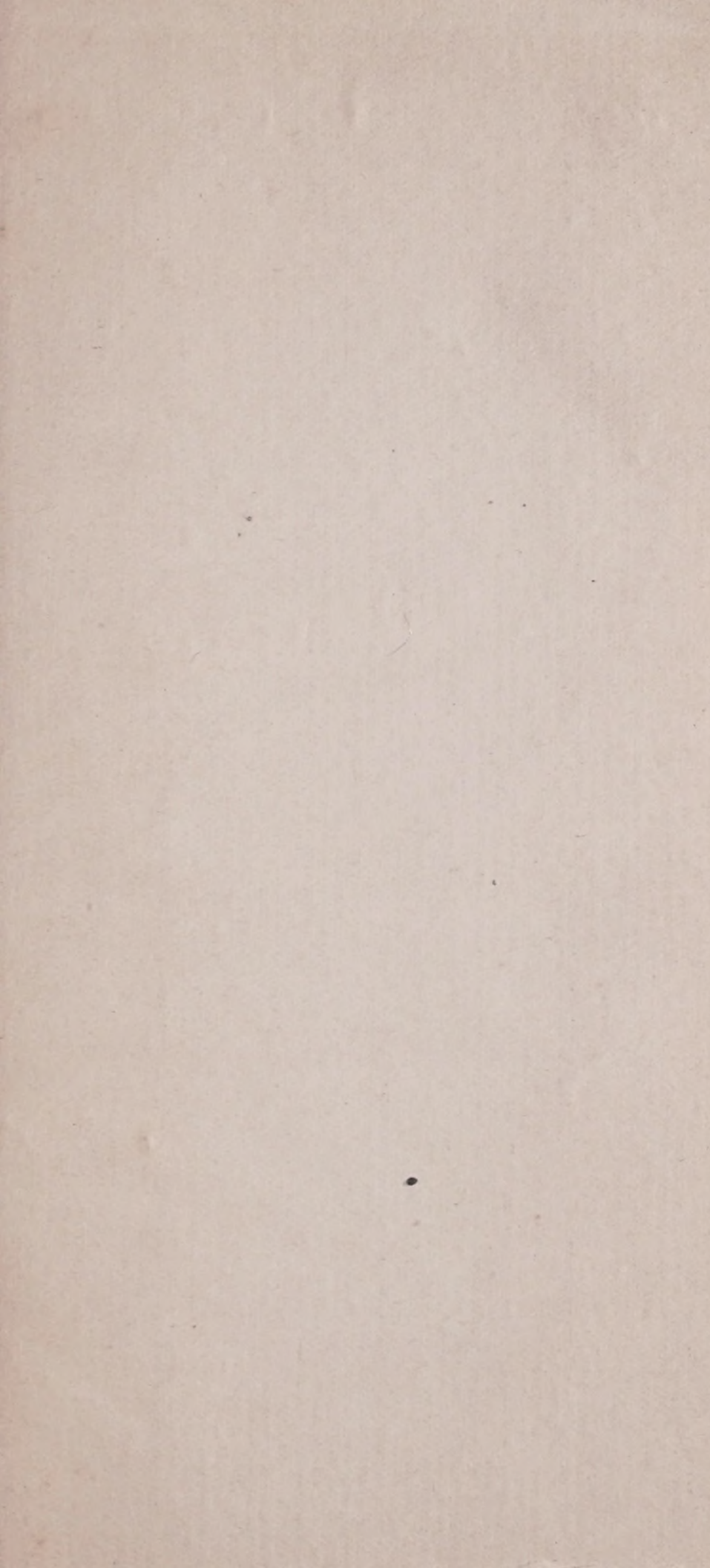














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